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### Recommendations for Redesign: Revising the Rochester Museum and Science Center's "Native Peoples of the Americas" Exhibit

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDESIGN:  
REVISING THE ROCHESTER MUSEUM AND SCIENCE CENTER'S  
*NATIVE PEOPLES OF THE AMERICAS* EXHIBIT

A THESIS SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE  
IN MUSEUM STUDIES

DEPARTMENTS OF PERFORMING ARTS AND VISUAL CULTURE AND HISTORY

BY

JESS ANDREWS

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## **Abstract**

This thesis proposes methods for redesigning the Rochester Museum and Science Center's (RMSC) *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit to ensure better representation of the Native cultures it displays. Explorations of these methods include a survey of the current exhibit, focusing on specific areas and design elements that need to be addressed, as well as brief comparative surveys of other Native American and ethnographic exhibits at the RMSC as well as exhibits at Ganondagan State Historic Site and the New York and Washington branches of the National Museum of the American Indian. The literature review considers the history of Native American collections and representation in American museums and provides some suggested methods for the redesign of Native American exhibits that have been put forth by museum professionals, historians, and members of Native American communities over the past 25 years. This thesis also includes primary research in the form of an interview with the Senior Director for Collections and Exhibits at the RMSC to learn the themes and concepts anticipated by the museum in the coming years, as well as visitor observations and summary reporting conducted by the author from November 2017 through February 2018 examining how the RMSC's visitors currently use the exhibit and how to improve their experience within it. The result of this work is a series of recommendations for the RMSC's collections and exhibitions staff to consider as they work to redesign *Native Peoples of the Americas* over the next several years.

## **Introduction**

Technology and modes of conveying information advance. Our political, social, and historical understandings of cultures shift. Museums evolve from dusty, elitist repositories of the world's art and artifacts to socially conscious stewards of community heritage and knowledge, with an ethical duty to engage with and educate the communities in which they reside and from which they receive support. However, despite these changes, some museum exhibits remain frozen in time, forgotten in back corners, or neglected in favor of newer, shinier blockbuster exhibits and programs that draw crowds of visitors and much needed revenue to museums that must constantly struggle to compete with other, less educationally enriching diversions. These exhibits, while time capsules of antiquated modes of thinking and outdated exhibition design techniques, are begging for emerging museum professionals, armed with the latest ideas in exhibition design and interpretive techniques, to redesign them.

However, redesigning an exhibit is not a task that a museum can take lightly. It is a painstaking process composed of a massive series of considerations ranging from the obviously important, such as what the exhibit's new focus and themes will be and who will design it, to the seemingly insignificant, such as the color of the walls and the dimensions of image borders. At institutions like the Rochester Museum and Science Center (RMSC) in Rochester, NY, such decisions are made not by a single individual, but by a group comprised of a number of cross-functional internal and external stakeholders, whose decisions are informed by a number of factors, including recent scholarship, front-end audience studies, and consultations with other stakeholders, including educators, members of relevant groups or communities, scientists, and/or historians.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Murano Santos, Senior Director for Collections and Exhibits at the RMSC, email to author, April 4, 2018.

It is this multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder approach to the exhibit research and decision-making process which this thesis seeks to replicate and apply on a small scale to the RMSC's *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit, which explores the diversity of indigenous American lifestyles, including those of the local Seneca, as expressed through material culture and the environment.<sup>2</sup> While the exhibit plays a valuable role in the RMSC's mission to "stimulate broad community interest and understanding of science and technology, and their impact — past, present, and future — on our lives," it has received no major updates since the late 1980s, and as a result is extremely dated in terms of design aesthetic, themes, interpretive technologies and methods, and, most importantly, the information it provides to visitors.<sup>3</sup> Thus the research conducted as part of this thesis seeks to change the current state of the exhibit by helping to craft a series of recommendations for how the exhibit can be redesigned to not only be a better fit within the museum, but also to ensure better representation of the Native cultures it displays.

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis uses the terms "Seneca" and "Haudenosaunee" in place of the more familiar, but colonialist term "Iroquois" (except for where it is used as part of a proper name). The Seneca are a group of indigenous Iroquoian-speaking people native to the region south of Lake Ontario that are part of a larger five (in some sources six) member "league" properly referred to as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

<sup>3</sup> "Our Mission," Rochester Museum and Science Center, January 23, 2018, <http://www.rmhc.org/about/mission-statement>.

## **Methods**

Given the multifaceted nature of an exhibit like *Native Peoples of the Americas*, it stands to reason that any research conducted before its redesign should be equally multifaceted and include a range of methods. To that end, research for this thesis and the resulting recommendations included not only text-based research, but also visitor observation within the exhibit space, review of thematically or conceptually similar exhibits and sites, and an interview with the member of the RMSC's staff who will be primarily responsible for the exhibit's redesign and renovation as it moves forward.

### **Text-Based Research**

Text-based research for this thesis was used to gain broader context for both the history of Native American collections, display, and representations in American museums and for such practices at the RMSC. It also provided recent recommendations for redesigning Native American exhibits from historians, museum professionals, and members of Native Communities. Materials utilized for this research included peer-reviewed journals and books, as well as an unpublished history of the RMSC from its founding in 1912 through the late 1970s.

### **Visitor Observations**

Each observation session lasted for about an hour and consisted of the observer moving from subsection to subsection of the exhibit, not directly interacting with the visitors to avoid biasing their comments and behaviors, but taking notes on their comments, behaviors, and interactions with each other, the exhibit content, and the physical space. Also noted were the approximate ages of the visitors, as these could be used to determine patterns in visitorship and

to identify the exhibit's main visitor groups, to whom the changes of the exhibit should be tailored to a certain extent.

In terms of the criteria for who was counted as a “visitor” to the exhibit, an individual needed to enter the exhibit and interact with it in some way, whether by commenting on something they saw as they hurried past on their way to the restroom, pointing out an object to a friend, or walking through the exhibit and pausing to read multiple text panels.

### **Case Studies**

To gain a further understanding of not only the current state of *Native Peoples*, but of the broader institutional representation of Native Americans, a total of five exhibits or institutions were reviewed. Four of these sites were visited in person between November and December 2017, namely *Native Peoples of the Americas*; *Face to Face: Encounters With Identity*; *At the Western Door*; and the Exhibit Gallery of the Seneca Art and Culture Center at the Ganondagan State Historic Site. The latter three exhibits were each chosen because they in some way present Native cultures locally (*Face to Face* and *At the Western Door* are both located at the RMSC, while Ganondagan is in nearby Victor, NY), and feature different elements and concepts that might be beneficial to incorporate into *Native Peoples of the Americas*. The fifth site was not one site, but two closely related sites: the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C., and its satellite campus at the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City, both of which provided some basic ideas and examples for the possibilities of greater integration of technology, community outreach, and Native collaboration within the museum space.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Unlike the other exhibits/sites, I did not visit the NMAI or the Heye Center. However, I did review various articles and blogs about the NMAI's exhibits and visited its website to learn more about some of its outreach and education programming, an area which I believe the RMSC might benefit from expanding with regards to its Native American exhibits.



These surveys took the form of a broad examination of exhibit content and methods of display, from the perspectives of both a visitor and an emerging museum professional. Notes were taken pertaining to physical design elements of each space, the thematic concepts that were explored, and the use of language and Native voice (when and where present). Photographs were also taken of key features for documentation and example purposes.

It should be noted that these surveys were, by no means, exhaustive, as the focus of them was to gain a general understanding of how each exhibit displays its content both physically and thematically. The accuracy of the written exhibit content was not the focus, nor was it evaluated beyond acknowledging the amount of content presented, the verb tense employed, and the presence of Native voices when and where they exist within the label copy.

## **Interview**

An interview with Kathryn Murano Santos, Senior Director for Collections and Exhibits for RMSC, was conducted on January 12, 2018, to gain a better understanding of not only what the museum sees as potential problem areas within *Native Peoples of the Americas*, but the conceptual direction they would like to see the exhibit move towards as it is reviewed and redesigned in the near future. Murano Santos has been with the RMSC for fifteen years in various capacities including Collections Department Coordinator and Registrar, in which time as a NAGPRA<sup>5</sup> associate, she directed two successful NAGPRA consultation/documentation grants, one NPS-funded NAGPRA grant project to review more than 800 Arctic anthropology

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<sup>5</sup> The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, better known as NAGPRA, is a piece of federal legislation which protects Native American burials and remains found on federal lands, as well as requiring museums and institutions that receive federal funding to review their collections and repatriate (formally return) any Native American remains and/or sacred/funerary objects to the appropriate tribe, clan, or Native group when and where possible. For more on NAGPRA, please visit: <https://www.nps.gov/nagpra/>.

collection objects for repatriation in consultation with Elders from Inupiat, Yupik, Athabascan, and Aleut tribes in Alaska, and facilitated the repatriation of more than 450 sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony to Native American nations. The redesign of the exhibit in the coming years will ultimately be under her supervision.

While five basic questions were prepared for this interview (see Appendix 3), the organization of the interview was informal and conversational, with the first question being posed by the author and Murano Santos responding to it and then elaborating on a number of related ideas, allowing the questions to be answered in a more organic fashion. Conducting this interview in the exhibit space itself also allowed Murano Santos to articulate with specificity actual examples from the current display as to elements she (speaking for the institution) would like to see changed or retained within the exhibit.

## **Literature Review**

Before surveying and making recommendations for the redesign of an exhibit like the Rochester Museum and Science Center's *Native Peoples of the Americas*, it is important to understand the cultural and historic framework upon which the exhibit was originally created. To that end, the first section of this literature review provides a brief summary of the history of Native American representation in American museums, so as to facilitate a better understanding of how Native American artifacts and remains came to be in the possession of non-Native museum institutions, and the ways in which these institutions utilized such collections in various contexts and forms of display. It is also of vital importance to take into account recommendations for best practices put forth by experts in the field, thus the second section of this literature review serves as an overview of the most common recommendations proposed by various historians, Native American community members, and museum professionals regarding methods of changing and improving how Native Americans are represented in museums today. Despite the sources cited herein spanning over twenty-five years of scholarly writing on the subject of Native American representation in museums, the authors cite many of the same themes and ideas, thus highlighting a longstanding and ever-present need for change in this area of exhibition design.

## **A Brief History of Native American Collections and Their Display**

### **The Origins of Collection and Display**

While Native American artifacts have been on private display as “artificial curiosities” in European “wonder rooms” since the 16th and 17th centuries (Figure 1), the American practice of

displaying Native American remains and artifacts in publicly-accessible museums is only about as old as the nation itself.<sup>6</sup> Charles Willson Peale, who in 1794 founded in Philadelphia what is commonly considered one of the first public museums in the nation, was gifted some 70-odd Native American artifacts collected by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark during their famous expedition to explore the western portion of the United States (1804-6).<sup>7</sup> Peale, who, like many of his contemporaries, considered Native Americans to be as much a part of the American natural ecosystem as any plant, animal, or rock, arranged these objects in the cases of his museum according to their form, development, and geographical origin, as he would with any other natural specimen.<sup>8</sup>

Peale's museum would serve as the unofficial repository of the nation's historic and scientific collections until the opening of the Smithsonian in 1846.<sup>9</sup> However, it would take the Smithsonian an additional 30 years to amass significant collections of Native American artifacts and remains, aided first by the Army Medical Museum (AMM), with which the Smithsonian had come to an agreement in 1867 to receive the burial and cultural items associated with the Native remains that were studied and displayed at the AMM, and then by the Bureau of American Ethnology, which was opened in 1879. The Bureau would later partner with the US National Museum, where many of the artifacts in the Smithsonian's collection would come to be housed and displayed.<sup>10</sup> As a result of collaborations like these, as well as the acquisition of private

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<sup>6</sup> Evan M. Maurer, "Presenting the American Indian: From Europe to America," in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*, edited by W. Richard West, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> Danielle LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians in the Museum of Natural History," *Wicazo Sa Review* 15, no. 1 (2000): 71; Ira Jacknis, "A New Thing? The National Museum of the American Indian in Historical and Institutional Perspective," in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, edited by Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>8</sup> LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 31.

<sup>9</sup> Jacknis, "A New Thing?" 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Jacknis, "A New Thing?" 5; Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 29.

collections of artifacts and remains, the Native American collections of the Smithsonian grew exponentially during the mid-1800s, from 550 objects in 1860 to more than 13,000 by 1873.<sup>11</sup>

During the mid to late 1800s, increased interest in the collecting of Native American artifacts and remains on the part of the United States government, its sponsored institutions, and private collectors was accompanied by increased questions as to the status of Native Americans as human beings.<sup>12</sup> Scholars and theologians could find no evidence of, or explanation for, Native Americans in the Bible and, from the ensuing debate, two trains of thought emerged. Polygenists heretically believed that Native Americans and other indigenous peoples were the result of a second act of creation not mentioned in the Bible and were thus a separate species from Europeans entirely. Monogenists, on the other hand, believed environmental factors were at play, and that the different races were members of the same species that had evolved differently due to different environments, the implication therefore being that Native Americans were a less evolved form of the same race as Europeans.<sup>13</sup> Geographer and ethnologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft attempted to prove this to be the case by using a linguistic approach, comparing Native American languages and dialects to each other, then to European languages to attempt to determine how they were connected, while physician Samuel George Morton looked at biological evidence, including some of the over 4,500 Native American crania which would eventually come to reside in the Smithsonian's collections by 1890.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the legal and anthropological status of indigenous peoples in the Americas was already a long-debated topic amongst theological and political scholars by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. For more on this, see: Paul III, *Sublimus Dei* [On the Enslavement and Evangelization of Indians], Papal Encyclicals Online, February 20, 2017, accessed February 27, 2018, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/paul03/p3subli.htm>, and Johnson and Graham's *Lessee v. William M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. 543 (1823), more commonly known as the "Discovery Doctrine."

<sup>13</sup> LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 72.

<sup>14</sup> LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 73; Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 29.

The rise of anthropology as a specialized scholarly profession in the latter half of the 19th century did little to change the belief held by geographers and ethnologists that Native Americans were a lesser race.<sup>15</sup> By examining artifacts and observing Native Americans working with similar objects, Euro-American anthropologists concluded that Native Americans were living in an earlier evolutionary stage than their fellow humans. As a result, the commonly held theory amongst anthropologists and ethnographers of the time was that Native Americans were the living representatives of the human past and would either evolve or die off.<sup>16</sup>

### **Collecting and Representation in the Early 20th Century**

Manifest Destiny<sup>17</sup> had seemingly been fulfilled by 1890, when the superintendent of the U.S. Census Robert P. Porter declared the closure of the western frontier to further settlement, and many Native Americans had been moved from their native homelands and territories on to Federal reservations. It was at this time that anthropologists began to become concerned that government assimilation programs would remove any and all traces of Native culture.<sup>18</sup> This growing concern resulted in a rush to collect as many Native American cultural items as possible, through whatever means possible, which often meant the collections methods that were used were less than ethical.<sup>19</sup> During this time, ethnographic objects were frequently obtained directly from Native owners who, due to the extreme economic hardships of the reservation system, were forced to part with valued, often sacred objects for far less than they were actually

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<sup>15</sup> Jacknis, "A New Thing?" 5.

<sup>16</sup> LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 73.

<sup>17</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup>-century belief that the western settlement of white Americans across the North American continent was both justified and inevitable, a belief which was largely supported by the debate discussed in the previous section.

<sup>18</sup> LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 73; Jacknis, "A New Thing?" 6; Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 73; Duane H. King, "Exhibiting Culture: American Indians and Museums," *Tulsa Law Review* 45, no. 1 (2009): 26; Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 27.

worth to collectors.<sup>20</sup> While all types of artifacts were swept up in this collecting fad, collectors were in search of the most “authentic”— here meaning close to pre-European contact— artifacts they could find.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of this rampant and often disorganized collecting, hundreds of thousands of artifacts found homes in newly created municipal and state museums, such as the Field Museum in Chicago and the Arizona State Museum in Tucson (both founded in 1893), anthropology museums, such as the University of California Museum of Anthropology (founded in 1901 and now known as the Phoebe Hearst Museum), and private museums, such as George Gustav Heye’s Museum of the American Indian (founded in 1916).<sup>22</sup> Many items ended up in the storage areas of these institutions with vague or non-existent provenance, while others were incorporated into displays in cases on the museum floor (Figures 2 and 3).

While the evolution-oriented and typology-organized natural history displays made popular by earlier museums, such as Peale’s museum in Philadelphia, were, and still are, used to organize objects, dioramas, which are a contextualist method of display, had risen to popularity in the final decades of the 19th century. Dioramas showed objects in situ, typically accompanied by mannequins representing the objects’ owners, with the belief that, in that way, artifacts could be viewed from the Native point of view.<sup>23</sup> However, the unintended side-effect of this manner

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<sup>20</sup> Jacknis, “A New Thing?” 8; Karl A. Hoerig, “From Third Person to First: A Call for Reciprocity among Non-Native and Native Museums,” *Museum Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2010) accessed February 27, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01076.x>.

<sup>21</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 27; LaVaque-Manty, “There Are Indians,” 74.

<sup>22</sup> Jacknis, “A New Thing?” 5; King, “Exhibiting Culture,” 27.

Much of the inspiration behind the creation of these institutions can be traced to the patriotic fervor and obsession with showcasing the “other” that made up a large portion of the exhibits at the 1893 World’s *Columbian Exposition*, held in Chicago around the time of Field Museum’s founding. For the first time, many Americans were able to view both the history of the United States and various cultures from around the world that they had previously only been able to read about in books, and this undoubtedly increased both the popularity and number of public anthropological and ethnological displays around the country.

<sup>23</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 31.

of display was that they gave viewers the impression that the cultures depicted in the dioramas were, much like the scenes they depicted, frozen in time, an impression which was not helped by the fact that many dioramas in museums across the country remained unchanged until the 1950s or later.<sup>24</sup>

While dioramas and other exhibits on Native Americans stood frozen in time, giving museum-goers the impression that the cultures on display were—like the woolly mammoth replicas and Neanderthal dioramas they stood beside—no longer living and vibrant, museums eagerly continued to actively collect Native artifacts and remains through the first half of the 20th century. The collecting fervor began to die down in different parts of the country at different times, as the numbers of uncollected items dwindled. Collecting on the Northwest Coast tapered off by 1905, and the same happened in the Great Plains by 1915, while the Southwest managed to remain a viable source of artifacts well into the 1950s, thanks in no small part to the wealth of artifacts discovered during Depression-era public works projects, and 1950s highway and interstate construction.<sup>25</sup>

### **Artifact as Art and the Rise of the Red Power Movement**

During the mid-20th century, many art galleries, fueled by a contemporary fascination with Native Americans and other “Old West” tropes, as well as the rise of the formalist movement in art collecting, began to collect and display Native American artifacts— both authentic objects and those created for the tourist trade— as art.<sup>26</sup> Unlike history museums, which combined Native and European artifacts in one narrative, natural history museums, which functioned on colonialist narratives, and anthropology museums, which excluded western

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<sup>24</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 30; Jacknis, “A New Thing?” 23.

<sup>25</sup> Jacknis, “A New Thing?” 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Jacknis, “A New Thing?” 28; Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 28, 31.



perspectives in favor of indigenous ones, art galleries removed any and all context for artifacts by placing them on pedestals and presenting them as visually interesting pieces of art, rather than functional objects or sacred items.<sup>27</sup>

This period of artistic interpretation was soon followed by the rise of the Red Power Movement in the late 1960s and 70s, which had perhaps the most profound effect on the display of Native American artifacts and remains in museums.<sup>28</sup> Native Americans' desire for self-determination and equal representation in all things prompted not only a narrative shift from legends of vanishing cultures to tales of survival and resistance, but also saw the rise of the tribal museum, a uniquely Native form of institution.<sup>29</sup> In these museums, members of Native American communities were, for the first time, able to closely examine and protest the ways their histories and cultures were presented in non-Native institutions, and provided counter-narratives that presented their unique heritages as vital and alive, rather than frozen or extinct.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Native American communities also sought changes to non-Native museum exhibits, which showed no regard for tribal differentiations (beyond those created by anthropologists and ethnographers in the 19th century, many of which were incorrect), no acknowledgement of individual craftspeople, nor any focus on the deeper cultural meaning of objects beyond western anthropological and scientific categories of manufacture and use, or contemporary visual aesthetics.<sup>31</sup>

## **Change for the 21st Century**

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<sup>27</sup> Jacknis, "A New Thing?" 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>29</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 21; Hoerig, "From Third Person to First," <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01076.x>; Jacknis, "A New Thing?" 21.

<sup>30</sup> Hoerig, "From Third Person to First," <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01076.x>.

<sup>31</sup> Maurer, "Presenting the American Indian," 25; LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 78; Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 30.

Some of the changes to Native representation called for during the Red Power Movement slowly became reality over the following decades, resulting not only in changes to museum exhibits and programming, but also government reforms to museum and collecting laws, such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990, which protects Native American burial sites and provides guidelines for the repatriation of Native American remains, funerary artifacts, and sacred ceremonial objects from all federally-funded museums (with the exception of the Smithsonian) to their associated tribes and communities.<sup>32</sup> The year prior to the passing of NAGPRA, Heye's Museum of the American Indian merged with the Smithsonian to create the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), which opened its doors to the public in 2004 and has since been met with both support and protests from Native communities.<sup>33</sup>

### **Continuing This Change**

The consensus today among museum professionals, scholars, and members of Native American communities is that, while strides have been made in the representation and display of Native Americans in museums over the past 30 years, museums still have a long way to go.<sup>34</sup> While these individuals offer many suggestions as to the forms these continuing changes should take, two main themes tend to emerge from their recommendations—collaboration and contextualization.

Near the end of her 2000 article in the *Wicazo Sa Review: A Journal of Native American Studies*, political science scholar Danielle Lavaque-Manty calls for greater institutionalized

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<sup>32</sup> LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 87.

<sup>33</sup> Jacknis, "A New Thing?" 20.

<sup>34</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 21.

indigenous input with regard to Native American displays and exhibits in museums.<sup>35</sup> This call is echoed by a number of other scholars and museum professionals, most notably the late Duane H. King, former director of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and founder of the *Journal of Cherokee Studies*, who wished to see an increase in Native American representation on museum boards and staff when and where possible. When not possible, he recommended hiring Native Americans as exhibition consultants on a case-by-case basis.<sup>36</sup>

Cynthia Chavez Lamar, Assistant Director for Collections for the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), took the idea of Native Americans as exhibition consultants a step further when working on the one of the NMAI's first exhibits, *Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities*, in the early 2000s.<sup>37</sup> In 2001, Chavez Lamar, then a Native curator<sup>38</sup> at the museum, reached out to leading members of the eight communities the museum was interested in featuring in the exhibit, and offered them the opportunity to work with the museum on the exhibit.<sup>39</sup> Although the communities were initially hesitant, Chavez Lamar earned their trust by respecting their sovereignty as self-governing communities, issuing formal invitations to community leaders, and working with them to build goodwill.<sup>40</sup> She considers this process as having been paramount not only in gaining the trust of the communities, but also in creating a good, lasting working relationship with the community representatives, who came to be referred to as "community curators."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> LaVaque-Manty, "There Are Indians," 87.

<sup>36</sup> King, "Exhibiting Culture," 31.

<sup>37</sup> Cynthia Chavez Lamar, "Collaborative Exhibit Development at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian," in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, edited by Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 144.

<sup>38</sup> Chavez Lamar notes that, as a Native American herself, she believes she faced less resistance than a non-Native might have, had they attempted to initiate a similar collaborative process.

<sup>39</sup> Chavez Lamar, "Collaborative Exhibit Development," 144.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 144-5.

Chavez Lamar ensured the continued success of the collaborative process by confirming early on in the process that the parameters for the exhibition were clear and agreed upon by all of the involved parties, and frequently checking in with the community curators over the course of the project to ensure the equitable use of Native voice within the exhibit.<sup>42</sup> This was largely accomplished by having the community curators provide the museum staff with raw information, such as life stories, traditional myths, or their take on important contemporary issues, and then having the staff refine these materials and pull out cross-cultural themes and issues to be addressed within the exhibit.<sup>43</sup> This system helped the NMAI staff to develop what Chavez Lamar calls the “5 Phase Process,” which is now followed by NMAI when working on all of their collaborative exhibitions. The process begins with a representative from NMAI meeting with community leadership to invite them to participate in the exhibit project. If this invitation is met with a positive response, it is followed by extensive fieldwork within the community. Museum staff will then draft exhibit content based upon the community input and submit it to the community for review. This review is followed by a period of revision by museum staff and a resubmission to the community curators, who give their final critiques before the exhibit is installed. Museum staff then present the final exhibit content and design to the community curators.<sup>44</sup>

Chavez Lamar has found that this collaborative process has cut down on the amount of stereotype perpetuation, both by misguided, but well-meaning museum staff and by Native

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 146, 149.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 149.

The participatory practice described by Chavez Lamar in relation to the NMAI’s “5 Phase Process” and community curators is not isolated to museums working with Native communities. Rather it is part of a larger shift in collaborative museum practices that has been ongoing since the 1960s and 70s. For more on this, see: Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010).

communities attempting to strongly identify as “Indian.”<sup>45</sup> However, she highlights the importance of acknowledging where in the exhibit Native voice ends and the curatorial voice begins, as many visitors have a tendency to look at collaborative exhibits and assume that museum staff had no input or control over what was put on their walls.<sup>46</sup> To prevent this assumption, the late Michael Baxandall, a British-born art historian and professor emeritus of Art History at University of California, Berkeley, cited the importance of making such distinctions clear to visitors by acknowledging the essential role that museum staff (whom he refers to as exhibitional “middlemen”) play by providing technical guidance and expertise to their Native collaborators.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Amy Lonetree, an associate professor of history at University of California Santa Cruz, states that the “multivocal exhibit model allows for multiple perspectives in the exhibitions,” but that it is vital for contributors, both within and without the museum, to be acknowledged accordingly, both so credit is given where credit is due, and so museum visitors understand where the information and ideas they are receiving comes from.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the potential difficulty of maintaining this delicate balancing act between Native and institutional curatorial voices, the NMAI’s community curator-style relationships could lead quite easily into one of the reciprocal relationships described by Karl A. Hoerig in his 2010 article, “From Third Person to First: A Call for Reciprocity among Non-Native and Native

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<sup>45</sup> LaVaque-Manty, “There Are Indians,” 79; Myla Vicenti Carpio, “(Un)disturbing Exhibitions: Indigenous Historical Memory at the National Museum of the American Indian,” in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, edited by Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 292; Chavez Lamar, “Collaborative Exhibit Development,” 157.

<sup>46</sup> Chavez Lamar, “Collaborative Exhibit Development,” 154.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 39.

<sup>48</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 36.

As is apparent by the number of footnotes citing Lonetree, her work has been essential in my understanding of both the history of the collection and representation of Native Americans, and the roles Native Americans can and should play in the design of exhibits that pertain to them.

Museums.” As Hoerig, the director of the White Mountain Apache Tribe's Nohwike' Bágowa (House of Our Footprints) Museum at Fort Apache, Arizona, explains, Eurocentric “dominant-society” museums have long looked at Native communities as sources for objects and information, but they have rarely returned the favor.<sup>49</sup> This perpetuates “the colonialist model of extraction from subject communities with little compensation to those communities.”<sup>50</sup> In order to rectify this, non-Native museums should consider how they can serve not only their needs, but those of the tribal communities they represent, when planning, funding, and developing their exhibitions.<sup>51</sup> The easiest way to do this, according to Hoerig, is for non-Native museums to partner with tribal museums during the exhibition process, with the final exhibition including elements that could also be installed in the tribal museums.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the non-Native institutions benefit from “direct access to the histories, stories, perspectives, and understandings” present within tribal museums, and the tribal museums benefit from the expertise of formally trained staff, something which many tribal museums lack.<sup>53</sup>

Closer collaboration with Native communities is not the only change proposed by museum professionals, scholars, and Native American activists. Many would also like to see changes in the way Native objects are displayed. Lonetree advocates for museums to “move away from object-based presentations that focus on the functions and uses of objects according to ethnographic categories.”<sup>54</sup> She instead recommends that curators work to “make stronger connections to the relationships that pieces have to contemporary communities,” by working with community advisory boards (like the NMAI’s community curators) to develop overarching

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<sup>49</sup> Hoerig, “From Third Person to First,” <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01076.x>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 37.

themes and concepts for exhibitions.<sup>55</sup> This does not mean that fewer objects should be used in exhibitions, but rather that the arrangement and methods of contextualizing objects should change.

Hoerig writes that “objects must be put into context through presentation and interpretation of many elements of a community's experiences and ways of life.”<sup>56</sup> There are a number of ways to do this, including, as Michael Baxandall recommends, offering relevant facts that inspire the visitor to both ask questions about the object and the culture it comes from, and connect with the object on a personal level.<sup>57</sup> Patrick Houlihan, a former director of the New York State Museum in Albany, insists that this connection must not just be on the level of momentary resonance with the object and its meaning or use, but also on the level of long-term reverberation, where a visitor will be able to remember and make connections to the emotional and intellectual experience they had when viewing the object for years to come.<sup>58</sup>

A method of achieving this reverberation is through juxtaposition. Again recommended by Baxandall, this method of display seeks to compare and contrast objects from both Native and non-native cultures, as well as from different Native cultures, that share a common theme or use, thus highlighting both cultural differences and similarities and allowing for cross-cultural meaning making.<sup>59</sup> However, non-Native curators must be careful when attempting to use this method, as Native objects may have different meanings to Native Americans than they do to non-Natives, and it is the Native perspective on the objects that should be presented to the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Hoerig, “From Third Person to First,” <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01076.x>.

<sup>57</sup> Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention,” 40.

<sup>58</sup> Patrick T. Houlihan, “The Poetic Image and Native American Art,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 211.

<sup>59</sup> Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention,” 40.

visiting public.<sup>60</sup> This, in turn, does not mean that curators need to attempt to force complex indigenous concepts into oversimplified labels contextualized by non-Native norms to ensure that their visitors understand them.<sup>61</sup> Instead, they should allow explanations to come directly from Native Americans themselves, via audio and video, text panels, and, where and when possible, live presentations.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Houlihan, "The Poetic Image and Native American Art," 209.

<sup>61</sup> Chavez Lamar, "Collaborative Exhibit Development," 154-5; Baxandall, "Exhibiting Intention," 34.

<sup>62</sup> The latter of which connects closely to a major constructivist principle of museum education, wherein active visitor participation is used to not only help the visitor better understand what is happening, but to draw out cultural differences as well. For more on constructivist theory as applied to museum education, please visit: [http://georgehein.com/information\\_new/museum\\_15.html](http://georgehein.com/information_new/museum_15.html)

Hoerig, "From Third Person to First," <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01076.x>.



## **A Brief History of the RMSC's Native American Exhibits and Collections**

While it is important to understand the greater cultural and historic framework which undoubtedly inspired and led to the development of *Native Peoples of the Americas* and other Native American exhibits at the RMSC, one cannot begin to consider redesign and recontextualization of the exhibit without first acknowledging the RMSC's long and unique history with its Native American collections and exhibits.

### **Early Days**

The RMSC opened its doors to the public as the Rochester Municipal Museum (RMM) on September 13, 1912.<sup>63</sup> While its ambitious and unofficial mission to foster public interest in natural science, anthropology, archaeology, history, and technology always included the display and interpretation of the greater Rochester region's rich Native American history and heritage, the only collections item the fledgling museum owned that opening day was a simple wooden ox yoke.<sup>64</sup> This was the result of a lack of funding for new acquisitions, something which would be a constant struggle during the museum's early years. As a result, the museum was forced to appeal to the generosity of the Greater Rochester community, which responded by providing the museum with a motley assortment of objects, including a large number of Native American artifacts contributed or loaned to the museum by amateur collectors.<sup>65</sup> Keeping with museum standards of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the museum then arranged these artifacts in cases according to object type (projectile weapon heads, pottery, textiles) and provided little or no

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<sup>63</sup> Leatrice Kemp, "RMSC History" (unpublished manuscript, July 11, 2012), Word Document.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Shedlock, "History of the Rochester Museum and Science Center" (unpublished manuscript, [1981?]), PDF. Pages 7, 46.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 19-21.

information to identify or contextualize the objects to its visitors. And thus the Native American collections remained until 1924, when Arthur C. Parker became the museum's director.<sup>66</sup>

### **Arthur C. Parker Takes Charge**

Arthur Caswell Parker was born in 1881 to a father of European and Seneca descent and an Anglo-American mother and spent his early years on the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation in Erie County, NY (for reference, see Figure 4).<sup>67</sup> This familial background and early experience would prove highly useful to Parker when, following a brief period of studying to be a minister at the Williamsport Dickinson Seminary, he relocated to New York City, where he frequented the halls of the American Museum of Natural History.<sup>68</sup> There, his unique insight and expertise was recognized by museum staff, and he found himself recruited for museum projects, such as a 1903 archaeological survey of the Cattaraugus Reservation where he had spent his early childhood.<sup>69</sup> The following year, he helped lead an archaeological survey of the entire state of New York, which is now acknowledged to be one of the first and most important of such surveys ever conducted.<sup>70</sup> By 1905, Parker had risen to the post of ethnologist for the New York State Library, and by 1906, he was State Archaeologist for New York State.<sup>71</sup> In his time at the State Library and as the State Archaeologist, his archaeological research yielded a number of publications including, "An Erie Indian Village and Burial Site of Ripley, Chautauqua County, New York" and "Myths and Legends of the New York State Iroquois." Between 1911 and 1923, he also founded the Society of Native Americans, organized the first American Indian Day, edited

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

<sup>67</sup> Joy Porter, *To Be Indian: The Life of Iroquois-Seneca Arthur Caswell Parker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 17, 21.

<sup>68</sup> Shedlock, "History of the Rochester Museum and Science Center," 22.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 23.

*American Indian Magazine*, served as New York State Indian Commissioner, presided over the New York State Indian Welfare Society, and acted as an advisor on Indian affairs to Presidents Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, and Coolidge.<sup>72</sup> Thus, by the time Parker came to the museum in the mid-1920s, he was a self-taught and well-respected authority on Native American anthropology and museum representation.<sup>73</sup>

Parker's first challenge as RMM Director was to develop and execute a formal mission, something that the museum sorely lacked. As a result, by 1925, the museum had its first well-defined thematic scope and collecting focus—the anthropology, geology, biology, history, and industry of the Genesee Region.<sup>74</sup> In 1927, with this new focus in mind, Parker directed the Anthropology Department to begin focusing on collecting the artifacts and remains of the early Native American occupants of the Genesee area, particularly the Haudenosaunee and Seneca. At the same time, he also encouraged the continued collection of non-regional items, such as Sioux war bonnets, an Eskimo kayak, southwestern textiles, and Hopi Kachina dolls, for use as cross-cultural comparative items.<sup>75</sup>

With this new collecting focus came a need for new modes of display. Parker wanted the RMM to focus on the relatively new concept of active interpretation, the practice of presenting relevant information to the visitor alongside a framework to interpret and understand this information. He believed that, “interpretation is one of the most important features of exhibition.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Parker presents an interesting contradiction in terms of how his identity relates to his museological work. While technically of Seneca descent (although, due to the matrilineal nature of Seneca familial lines, this is open to debate) and frequently identified, by himself and by others, as being Native American, Parker tended to prioritize Western scientific and anthropological methods over the use of Native voice and input in collecting and exhibition practices. This would, of course, be reflected in his work, both at RMSC and beyond. For more on this see: Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, *Inheriting the Past: The Making of Arthur C. Parker and Indigenous Archaeology*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Shedlock, “History of the Rochester Museum and Science Center,” 24.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 24, 59.

The visitor not only wants to see an object but he wants to know what it means and what value it has to himself and to knowledge in general.”<sup>76</sup> But before he could interpret the collection, Parker first had to determine how he wanted to organize the objects and artifacts he would display. He eventually settled on two organizational schemes. One part of his new exhibit would feature a chronological examination of the development of local Haudenosaunee culture from Archaic Indian culture through the Woodland and Owasco Indian cultures. The second section would focus on groups of Native Americans by geographic region and would feature a number of dioramas depicting various Native ways of life across the country.<sup>77</sup>

In 1935, in addition to his work within the museum, Parker acquired funding from the Works Progress Administration to develop the Seneca Indian Arts Project.<sup>78</sup> The project, prompted equally by Parker’s concern that traditional Seneca arts were disappearing and his desire to add Seneca ethnological materials to the museum’s collections, was an effort to revive and reproduce traditional Seneca arts and crafts.<sup>79</sup> From 1935-1941, the project employed approximately 100 Native Americans on the Tonawanda and Cattaraugus Reservations,<sup>80</sup> who produced over 5,000 objects, including not only art, but also reproductions of tools, clothes, and household goods, many of which still reside in the collections of the RMSC today.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Kathryn Murano Santos (Senior Director for Collections and Exhibits, RMSC) in discussion with the author, January 2018.

The first portion of the exhibit, the local chronology, is believed to have been curated by Curator of Archaeology, William A. Ritchie, and was installed in its current space sometime during the 1940s or 50s, while the second, geographically organized section was designed by Lois Shaffer, the RMSC’s Exhibits Designer, and installed in the late 1980s. The latter section was created to fit around the pre-existing dioramas, which are again believed to have been curated by Ritchie, designed by museum artist Jon Alexander, and prepared by Alexander and John B. Upham (the latter of whom was well known in Rochester at the time for his historical dioramas) at some point between 1946 and 1952. In future, further research into the internal records of the RMSC may be necessary to determine more exact dates and details regarding the design and installation of the different components of the exhibit.

<sup>78</sup> Shedlock, “History of the Rochester Museum and Science Center,” 27, 59.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>80</sup> See Figure X. for locations relative to RMSC.

<sup>81</sup> Shedlock, “History of the Rochester Museum and Science Center,” 60.

Unfortunately, a fire at Tonawanda destroyed many of the project's records and objects, and this, coupled with the increasing demand on physical and material resources for World War II, forced Parker to end the project.<sup>82</sup>

### **The Post-Parker Years**

By the time Parker retired from the RMM in 1946, the museum was running out of storage space for its collections, but was still participating in the active collection of Native artifacts and remains.<sup>83</sup> Returning to its collecting roots, the anthropology collection was expanded via loans from local collectors and purchases from Native American reservations.<sup>84</sup>

The museum also began to actively participate in local archaeology, coordinating and sponsoring archaeological digs throughout the region from the late 1940s through the early 1980s. As a result, hundreds of artifacts were added to the museum's collections at the end of each dig season.<sup>85</sup>

On July 1, 1968, the museum officially became the Rochester Museum and Science Center.<sup>86</sup> With this new name came the museum's first fully expressed mission:

“To provide all people with the opportunity to observe directly their own heritage, their changing natural environment, and their place in the universe. The RMSC serves as a vital resource in the community for the interpretation of the meaning of our past and present existence and for the creative anticipation of the future.”<sup>87</sup>

For the first time, the museum publicly acknowledged the importance of its role in educating the Greater Rochester community about its collective past. This acknowledgement coincided with an

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 58.

This practice was, at the time, entirely legal. It would not be until the mid-to-late 80s and early 90s that legislation would more closely regulate the excavation and removal of Native American artifacts and remains.

<sup>86</sup> Shedlock, “History of the Rochester Museum and Science Center,” 17.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

increase in public social consciousness and the rise of the Red Power Movement and resulted in changes to how the museum represented Native Americans. Some sections of exhibit texts were subtly changed to better reflect contemporary scholarship, and all human remains and a number of, but not all, sacred objects were removed from display and put into storage by the end of the 1970s.<sup>88</sup>

### **Anthropological Exhibit Additions**

While the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit has gone largely unchanged since the 1980s, this did not mean that the museum stopped adding new representations of Native Americans in its exhibit spaces.<sup>89</sup> The museum moved away from the chronologically and geographically arranged exhibits favored by Parker and his immediate successors, and towards carefully curated arrangements of objects selected to represent or evoke certain themes. This was the case with *Face to Face: Encounters With Identity*, an exhibit located adjacent to *Native Peoples of the Americas*. Opened in 1983 for what was originally only meant to be a five-year run, *Face to Face* was designed by then Curator of Anthropology, Richard Rose, and explored identity through “objects and symbols that both set us apart as individuals and bring us together in groups... personal objects [that] express our individuality... [and] family crests, national insignia, and religious icons [that] give us identity as groups.” The exhibit remains in the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 35, 70.

Moving forwards into the 1970s, the museum’s focus shifted away from the more historical and anthropological exhibits of the past, towards the science and technology of the future. This means that, after 1968, little was written about the collections and exhibit known today as *Native Peoples of the Americas*. (Per conversation with Kathryn Murano Santos of the RMSC).

<sup>89</sup> It should be noted that some changes have occurred to the exhibit by necessity, such as the movement of a “Coming to America” exhibit from one side of the space to another in 2007 to make way for an Underground Railroad exhibit (at which time the “Coming to America” section was updated it to reflect current scholarship on the subject of human migration), and object removals due to NAGPRA and conservation issues with certain art and artifacts. (Kathryn Murano Santos, email to author, April 4, 2018).

museum today, and features over 350 objects from five continents, arranged into five micro-exhibits which each illustrate a different aspect of identity.<sup>90</sup>

The RMSC followed this first successful thematic anthropology exhibit with a second in 1988—*At The Western Door*. Like *Face to Face*, the exhibit juxtaposes objects from multiple cultures—Western New York’s native Haudenosaunee and the region’s various groups of European settlers—to examine the complex relationship between them, focusing on the themes of cultural change and continuity, beginning with first contact and continuing these themes to the present.<sup>91</sup>

### **RMSC Today and Tomorrow**

In more recent years, the RMSC has moved away from actively collecting Native American artifacts, and towards responsible stewardship of its existing Native American collections and exhibits. Inspired by Arthur C. Parker’s legacy of cooperative institutional involvement with Native communities and modern federal legislation like the Native American Graves Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA), the museum has worked closely with various Native groups across the country to identify and repatriate (formally return) objects of sacred, funerary, and/or ceremonial importance to the appropriate tribes, clans, or Native organizations.<sup>92</sup> One of the most notable of these repatriation efforts was the 2015 return of a

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<sup>90</sup> Richard Rose, *Face to Face: Encounters With Identity* (Rochester: Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1983).; “Face to Face: Encounters with Identity,” Rochester Museum and Science Center, January 23, 2018, <http://www.rmhc.org/science-museum/exhibits/item/34-face-to-face-encounters-with-identity>.

<sup>91</sup> Kathryn Murano Santos (Senior Director for Collections and Exhibits, RMSC) in discussion with the author, January 2018.; “At The Western Door,” Rochester Museum and Science Center, January 23, 2018, <http://www.rmhc.org/science-museum/exhibits/item/15-at-the-western-door>.

<sup>92</sup> Kathryn Murano Santos (Senior Director for Collections and Exhibits, RMSC) in discussion with the author, January 12, 2018.

Chilkat<sup>93</sup> blanket, which had resided in the museum’s collections for almost 90 years, to representatives of a Tlingit tribe from Alaska.<sup>94</sup>

Looking to the future, the RMSC would like to not only see its Native American exhibits (including *Native Peoples of the Americas*) better connect with designs and themes of other exhibits at the museum, but also reflect its current mission to “[stimulate] broad community interest and understanding of science and technology, and their impact—past, present, and future—on our lives.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> A traditional form of weaving practiced by several groups native to Alaska and British Columbia.

<sup>94</sup> Kathryn Murano Santos, “Museums in Motion Today,” in *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*, Edward P. Alexander, Mary Alexander, and Juilee Decker (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 226-227.

<sup>95</sup> Rochester Museum and Science Center, “Our Mission.”



## Case Studies

### *Native Peoples of the Americas*

This brings us to the current state of *Native Peoples of the Americas* as it exists today (Figure 5). It is easiest to consider *Native Peoples* by dividing it into the two primary sections originally devised by Arthur C. Parker-- a chronological examination of the development of local Seneca culture, and a geographically organized survey of a number of Native cultures from across North and South America.

The first section, the chronology, can be entered from either the Rochester Business Hall of Fame, or *Flight to Freedom: Rochester's Underground Railroad* exhibit, and features three U-shaped exhibit "bays," containing artifacts from the "Archaic," "Woodland," and "Owasco Indian Cultures," typically mounted to clear acrylic backings which are suspended from the tops of the cases or resting on staggered shelving (Figures 6 and 7). Each case in these three bays is backed by a hand painted mural representing different aspects of Native life and culture at each given time period (Figure 8).<sup>96</sup> In addition to these three bays there is, as the visitors enter from the *Hall of Fame*, an L-shaped bay featuring a life-size archaeological dig site diorama and a timeline of prehistoric Native cultures (Figure 9). On the wall that serves as the central divider between the two sections, there are a light up map showing paths of prehistoric human migration across the Americas,<sup>97</sup> a map of the Great Lakes region showing various historical events that impacted or involved local Native cultures, and two dioramas. The first diorama is a small-scale

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<sup>96</sup> These murals, perhaps painted by either Vera Achen Jewett or Jon Alexander (both artists employed by the museum during the 1940s and 50s), are not accompanied by captions or any other form of text that explains to the visitor what is happening in the scene. Again, further research in institutional records is needed to determine exactly when and by whom the murals were painted and what information they used to do so.

Kathryn Murano Santos, email to author, April 4, 2018.

<sup>97</sup> Light up element appears to be worn out and barely functional. When the button for it is pushed, it still lights up, but almost imperceptibly.

replica of a Seneca longhouse under construction, and the second is a full-scale diorama of a longhouse interior, complete with mannequins (Figures 10 and 11). Due to the use of “interior lighting,” rather than overhead lighting in this portion of the exhibit, it can be difficult to view parts of the exhibit, such as the map and human migration display.<sup>98</sup> And perhaps most importantly, text at both the case and object level of the exhibit is minimal to absent, and in the Owasco section, handwritten on labels that have become cracked and damaged due to age (Figure 13).

Between the first section and the second section there is an area of transition, featuring a series of cases along the entry wall containing exhibits on Seneca mythology, the many uses of corn husks in Seneca culture, the Indian Arts Project, and the Apaches.<sup>99</sup> Opposite this wall, another U-shaped bay features watercolor paintings and taxidermied examples of wildlife from the Rochester region and a video entitled, *The New York Iroquois: A Forest People*, and beside that, a pair of cases display a series of wooden figure carvings, entitled “Iroquois Woodcarving” and “Images of the Old Ways,” depicting Seneca sports and methods of hunting. This section leads not only to the second portion of the exhibit, but provides access to *Science on a Sphere* and *Face to Face: Encounters with Identity*, and some of the exhibit cases for *Native Peoples*

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<sup>98</sup> “Interior lighting” is a style of exhibit lighting first popularized in the 1930s, wherein only the interiors of the display cases are lit, leaving the rest of the exhibit space in darkness, so as to not distract from the items on display. It should also be noted that, since the initial exhibit survey was conducted in late November 2011, the RMSC has installed four new panels in this section under the heading “Haudenosaunee Today” (Figure 12). These panels are accompanied by removable spotlights, which have helped increase the light levels within the space. However, since this spotlighting is not a permanent fixture, lighting remains an issue for consideration. For more issues relating to low lighting levels in the exhibit, please see the “Visitor Observations” section.

<sup>99</sup> It is important to note here that the exhibit uses names and terms for different Native groups which these groups do not apply to themselves, or which are broad names for a variety of smaller groups. For example, the term “Apache” is a Zuni term applied by European-American colonizers and in fact refers to a number of Apache-speaking groups: Chiricahua, Jicarilla, Lipan, Mescalero, Plains Apache, and Western Apache, and has historically also been used to refer to the Comanches, Mojaves, Hualapais, and Yavapais, none of whom speak Apache languages. For more on this, please visit: Helen Oliff, “Native American Tribe Names,” Partnership with Native Americans, accessed March 15, 2018, <http://blog.nativepartnership.org/american-indian-tribes-names/>. Also, please note that I will be referring to the tribes and groups mentioned in this section by the names assigned them in the current exhibit, to correspond with the current floorplan diagram (Figure 5).

(“Navajos,” “Indians of the Plains,” and “Indians of the Southeast”) line the entrance to *Face to Face*, which runs parallel behind the second section of the exhibit.

The second section, the geographically organized survey, can again be accessed multiple ways, including, on one side, through the aforementioned *Science on a Sphere* and *Face to Face*, as well as a short hallway leading from the back of the *How Things Work* exhibit, and again, on the other, from *Flight to Freedom*. The section features four U-shaped bays along one-side (“Indians of the Plains,” “Pueblo Indians of the Southwest,” “Peoples of the Arctic,” and “Indians of Guatemala”), three on the central divider wall (“Algonquin Indians of Canada,” “Indians of the Northwest Coast,” and “Indians of Peru”), and a tabletop 3D topographical map with the locations of various Native groups indicated on it (Figure 14).<sup>100</sup> “Indians of the Plains,” “Pueblo Indians of the Southwest,” “Peoples of the Arctic,” “Algonquin Indians of Canada,” and “Indians of the Northwest Coast” all feature small-scale dioramas of the various cultures being displayed, and each diorama is accompanied by a small, carpeted step to allow smaller visitors the ability to look down into the dioramas (Figure 15).<sup>101</sup> This portion of the exhibit does feature overhead lighting, as well as some interior lighting, and also has a great deal more text than the first section. Each case (excluding the dioramas, which have their own labels) has a large text panel that gives the visitors information on the lives and cultures of the groups assigned to that respective section,<sup>102</sup> as well as a key to the numbered objects within the case, which are identified in terms of what the objects are and occasionally what they are made of and approximately how old they are, but not how they relate to the larger concepts expressed in the larger text panels. This section also addresses the absence of some objects from cases in both

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<sup>100</sup> This map is under glass but has sustained some damage (cracks and holes).

<sup>101</sup> For potential issues relating to these steps please see the “Visitor Observations” section.

<sup>102</sup> This information is provided in broad strokes and generalizations about the Native Americans living in that specific geographical region, as opposed to identifying individual groups or tribes.

parts of the exhibit, by giving a cursory explanation of NAGPRA on a panel mounted to the side of one of the cases (Figures 16 and 17).

When looking at the exhibit overall, there are a few issues that are consistent throughout, regardless of content or organizational scheme. For example, there is no signage to indicate which exhibit you are entering or exiting, in contrast to the exhibits on either end, all of which have signs that indicate the name of their respective exhibits. In lieu of exhibit signs, there are a large number of signs directing the visitors to the restrooms located on the opposite side of it, just outside *Flight to Freedom*.<sup>103</sup> This lack of appropriate signage, combined with the number of potential entrances, exits, and paths within the exhibit, leads to an issue of visitor flow throughout the exhibit, thus making any sort of prescribed path through the exhibit almost impossible to execute or enforce.

And a number of the exhibit's key issues exist within the text panels and object labels. In addition to the aforementioned lack of text, incorrect and outdated naming conventions, and damage to some labels throughout the exhibit, there is also a lack of consistency in the tenses used in the exhibit, with frequent fluctuations between tenses from one panel and label to the next. Additionally, labels using present tense are worded to make it seem as if some tribes/groups still live as they did 100+ years ago, while those written in past tense make it sound as if they no longer exist, even if they do, and this lack of consistency occurs frequently enough that it is noticeable should the visitor read multiple panels in a row. Within the content of the text itself, there is an overall lack of contextualization of objects, be it temporally, cross culturally, or otherwise, thus giving the impression of each time period or group being isolated from the

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<sup>103</sup> This may highlight the impression many visitors have that this exhibit is simply a passthrough to other exhibits and the restrooms. For more on this, please see the "Visitor Observations" section.

others, as well as from other historical goings on in the world at the time. And, perhaps most importantly for an exhibit about Native peoples, all the labels throughout the exhibit are written using curatorial voice, rather than a blend of curatorial and Native voice.<sup>104</sup>

### ***Face to Face: Encounters with Identity and At the Western Door***

It is important to note that *Native Peoples* is not the only exhibit at the RMSC that presents Native American cultures or their artifacts. As previously mentioned, both *Face to Face: Encounters with Identity* and *At the Western Door* feature Native American cultures, with *At the Western Door* centering on the complex relationship between Western New York's native Haudenosaunee and European settlers, and *Face to Face* exploring identity through "objects and symbols that both set us apart as individuals and bring us together in groups," including Native American artifacts.<sup>105</sup> Both exhibits juxtapose objects from different cultures in order to highlight both the universality of larger concepts and the different facets and values of the individual cultures, and both divide up their cases thematically, rather than geographically or chronologically, allowing visitors to make their own paths through the exhibits, rather than following a prescribed one (Figure 18). In *Face to Face* this freedom of movement throughout the exhibit is further aided by the use of "micro-exhibits," or several small-scale exhibits with different themes, concepts, and materials, that can be grouped together due to common thematic and/or design elements (Figure 19).

In addition to this, *At the Western Door*, the relatively newer of the two exhibits, provides the visitors with the opportunity to interact both physically (via hands-on interactives and audio presented from both the Native and European perspectives) and intellectually (engagement

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<sup>104</sup> Curatorial voice refers to the tone and diction used by an institution and/or its exhibition designers/curators/educators, rather than the tone and diction used by person or people being presented in the exhibit, i.e., "Native voice" or "voices."

<sup>105</sup> Rose, *Face to Face*; Rochester Museum and Science Center, "At The Western Door."

questions within exhibit text to inspire further inquiry and discussion) with the material that is being presented, rather than just presenting objects and information to be passively consumed by the visitor (Figures 20 and 21).

## **Exhibit Gallery, Seneca Art & Culture Center, Ganondagan State Historic Site**

Located approximately 20 miles away from the RMSC in Victor, NY, the Ganondagan State Historic Site opened in 2015, “fulfilling a 30-year vision of a permanent, year-round interpretive facility to tell the more than 2,000-year-old story of Seneca and Haudenosaunee contributions to art, culture and society.”<sup>106</sup> Situated on the site of a Seneca village that was destroyed by the British in 1687, Ganondagan today includes a gift shop selling artisanal goods, a full-sized replica of a 17th-century bark longhouse, walking trails spread out over more than 500 acres, and the Seneca Art & Culture Center, which features interactive and multi-media exhibits.<sup>107</sup> These exhibits are housed in the Center’s Exhibit Gallery, and are comprised of a number of smaller sub-exhibits, linked by both theme and design, which tell the story of not only the site, but the history of the region’s Seneca people as well.

The Exhibit Gallery is a large, open space with a wall of windows that allow natural light to suffuse the space and augment the overhead lighting attached to the high ceiling (Figure 22). Within this space there exists a number of cases and free-standing displays which are organized in a roughly chronological fashion, moving from the early history of the site on the side closest to the Center’s atrium, towards modern representations of the Seneca and Haudenosaunee on the other side of the room (Figures 23 and 24). This lack of a strict organizational scheme allows visitors to move freely throughout the space without the expectation of following a prescribed path, yet still conveys a sense of the passage of time, while unifying design elements such as the

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<sup>106</sup> “Welcome to Ganondagan,” Ganondagan, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://ganondagan.org/>.

The site is supported physically, spiritually, and financially by the Friends of Ganondagan, “a not for profit, 501c. (3) Corporation created in 1989 as a private educational partner to the Ganondagan State Historic Site.” Of the Friends’ fifteen-member board, nine identify as Native American and represent eight different Native groups. “Friends of Ganondagan,” Ganondagan, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://ganondagan.org/Support/Friends-Of-Ganondagan>.

<sup>107</sup> “Ganondagan State Historic Site,” Visit Finger Lakes, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://www.visitfingerlakes.com/listings/ganondagan-state-historic-site/354/>.

repetition of color and pattern within the space also help keep the gallery's various displays from feeling disjointed or out of place with one another (Figure 25).

In terms of the displays themselves, they vary greatly in subject matter, from an entire wall addressing the different means of “knowing” about history (Figures 26 and 27),<sup>108</sup> to the opposite wall which highlights the continuing and vibrant existence of the Seneca and Haudenosaunee in the Great Lakes region. Several cases juxtapose contemporaneous and thematically linked Native and European objects are juxtaposed with each other in the same case, highlighting thematic and cultural similarities and differences, and a temporary exhibit case on the entrance wall offers visitors the chance to learn about various aspects of Seneca and Haudenosaunee life, such as lacrosse and the role of women in society (Figure 28).<sup>109</sup>

The displays also vary greatly in terms of the medium through which information is conveyed and items are displayed. Facsimiles and surrogates of objects that are too fragile or absent from collection allow visitors to handle and interact with objects,<sup>110</sup> while pull-out drawers allow the display of documents that would normally be too light sensitive to display on an exhibit floor (Figure 29). Audio guide stands provide Native voice, as do video clips that provide modern examples of and context for customs, rituals, and traditions, and a looped video that can be heard throughout the entire exhibit, telling visitors about the history of Ganondagan, and an interactive touchscreen map shows changing Seneca territory over time (Figure 30). And

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<sup>108</sup> “Knowing” here meaning the various methods and means by which we can understand various historical events or lifestyles. For example, written European accounts (the traditionally accepted means of understanding much early North American history), Native American oral histories, and modern archaeological research and discoveries are all different ways of “knowing” about the history of Ganondagan, however they can be applied to any site where multiple narratives may be present.

<sup>109</sup> At the time the site was visited in December 2017, the case held an exhibit on the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team. This exhibit has since been replaced with *Hodinöhsö:ni' Women: From the Time of Creation*, which opened to the public on March 24, 2018. For more information on this exhibit, please visit: <http://ganondagan.org/hodinohso-ni-women--from-the-time-of-creation>.

<sup>110</sup> Almost all the objects on display are highly contextualized and have their use and significance explained via object labels and other case texts.



minds and bodies are engaged by hands-on interactives such as an oversized wooden bead model (Figure 31), a light up diorama of the site (Figure 32), and a light up longhouse model.

## **National Museum of the American Indian**

It is not enough to simply consider local exhibits and sites when addressing an exhibit that calls itself *Native Peoples of the Americas*-- it is also vital to acknowledge the groundbreaking collaborative work and dynamic exhibition design of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. and New York City (Figures 33 and 34).

The NMAI originated with the collections of George Gustav Heye (1874–1957), a mining engineer and avid collector of Native American art and artifacts during the first half of the 20th century. In 1916, Heye founded the Museum of the American Indian in New York City to enable him to display his vast collections to the public. Following Heye’s death in 1957, the museum entered a period of financial hardship and the idea was proposed to transfer the collections to the care of the Museum of Natural History, a move which never came to fruition.<sup>111</sup>

In the 1980s, discussions of a transfer of collections began again, this time with the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. This time, the transfer moved ahead, with President George H. W. Bush signing legislation on November 19, 1989 to facilitate the creation of the National Museum of the American Indian. This legislation provided for a small museum to be maintained in New York, an off-site storage and preservation facility, and a larger museum to be created in Washington, D.C. In 1994, the George Gustav Heye Center opened in New York City at the site of the former Alexander Hamilton Customs House. From 1999 to 2004, the Smithsonian worked to move more than 800,000 objects from Heye’s original facility in New York City, to the new Cultural Resources Center facility in Suitland, Maryland, and on

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<sup>111</sup> “National Museum of the American Indian,” Smithsonian Institution Archives, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/national-museum-american-indian>.

September 21, 2004, the National Museum of the American Indian opened on the National Mall in Washington, D.C..<sup>112</sup>

Today the NMAI utilizes its collection of over 800,000 artifacts and 300,000 images to fulfill its mission of “advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere—past, present, and future—through partnership with Native people and others.”<sup>113</sup> With regards to these partnerships, in addition to Cynthia Chavez Lamar’s previously mentioned “Community Curators” and “5 Phase Process,” both of which played instrumental roles in the NMAI’s early exhibits, the Museum also offers “Native Knowledge 360°” (NK360°) a series of educational materials and teacher trainings developed by NMAI and Native partners that incorporate Native narratives, more comprehensive histories, and accurate information in order to “enlighten and inform teaching and learning about Native America,” as well as to complement and expand on the themes presented in the NMAI’s exhibits, making this program a solid accompaniment to the NMAI’s exhibits.<sup>114</sup>

In terms of exhibits, the NMAI frequently works to incorporate technology and visitor engagement opportunities alongside more static exhibit cases and texts. These opportunities often take the form of more traditional audio and video elements (Figure 35), however, the Museum has begun to incorporate more touchscreen technology into its exhibits over the past few years (Figures 36 and 37), which allows for greater visitor interaction and engagement with exhibit content, as well as the ability to reduce physical labels, allowing for more space to display objects. And the Museum mounts not only historical or anthropological exhibits of

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Smithsonian Institution Archives, “National Museum of the American Indian,” “Mission Statement,” National Museum of the American Indian, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/about/mission/>.

<sup>114</sup> Chavez Lamar, “Collaborative Exhibit Development,” 149; “About Native Knowledge 360°,” National Museum of the American Indian, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://nmai.si.edu/nk360/about.cshhtml>.

Native artifacts and cultures, but also hosts exhibitions of contemporary Native art (Figure 38), and regularly augments its visitors' experiences by organizing Native performances, presentations, and lectures at both its New York and Washington, D.C. campuses, thus highlighting the continued existence, vibrancy, and uniqueness of Native cultures across the United States and the Americas (Figure 39).

**Interview with Kathryn Murano Santos, Senior Director for Collections and Exhibits,  
RMSC  
January 12, 2018**

When acting as an outsider considering the redesign of an exhibit like *Native Peoples of the Americas*, it is important to seek input from within the institution in order to best understand not only what the museum sees as potential problem areas within *Native Peoples*, but the conceptual direction they would like to see the exhibit move towards as it is reviewed and redesigned in the near future. To that end, what follows are the views expressed by Kathryn Murano Santos, Senior Director for Collections and Exhibitions for RMSC, under whose purview the redesign of the exhibit will fall.

One of the first issues she identifies with the exhibit is that the chronology of local Native cultures, which comprises roughly half of the exhibit's total area, is rarely understood by visitors to be a chronology. This is due, Murano Santos believes, to a lack of consistency in the level of text and labeling, as well as the absence of an overarching explanation of how the different cultures on display connect to one another. The section also ends abruptly with the Owasco culture (c. 1000 to 1350 CE) and offers no connections from the Owasco to the modern Seneca people, giving the impression that local native groups like the Owasco died out, rather than continuing to survive and thrive.<sup>115</sup>

The hand-painted murals in this section, which depict various scenes of Native life during each cultural era, also prove to be problematic, as they do not show the full range of human emotion, with the faces of the human figures, including young children, all bearing the same stern expression. Murano Santos raises the concern that these murals perpetuate the stereotype of the "stoic Indian" and, since they are not accompanied by any sort of captions, they do little to

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<sup>115</sup> Dean R. Snow, *The Iroquois* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 12, 34-35.

facilitate visitors' learning about the time periods and cultures on display in this section of the exhibit.<sup>116</sup>

Expanding her critique to both sections of the exhibit (the local chronology and the geographically organized survey of Native American cultures), Murano Santos laments the lack of Native voice and perspective throughout the exhibit, as well as the lack of more recent Native representations (such as profiles on contemporary Native groups or individuals) in the exhibit space, both things which the museum would like to see more of incorporated into future versions of the exhibit. She also points out that certain items associated with burials that are on display in the exhibit are labeled as such. Beyond the ethical issues that displaying objects removed from graves present, such identification of otherwise seemingly ordinary objects, such as fish hooks, beads, and projectile points, serves to highlight what she calls the exhibit's "gruesome fixation with death and burial," a direction that appeals to visitors' interest in the macabre, but does little to convey the themes the museum would like to convey to its visitors.

With regards to these themes, Murano Santos says that the museum would like to see the exhibit content shift to place a greater emphasis on human innovation and how the issues people today face are based upon decisions made in the past. One potential subtheme of this that could be explored in the exhibit would be the history and importance of human rights as related through the treatment of Native Americans by European explorers and colonizers (the current dearth in public knowledge on this subject being one reason Murano Santos identifies for the continued relevance of exhibits such as *Native Peoples of the Americas*). Others include the role of DNA testing in determining cultural ownership, ways of knowing about history, the cross-cultural flow of ideas and its impacts on both Native and European cultures, and variations in

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<sup>116</sup> For more on the concept of the "stoic Indian," read Kenneth S. Sacks, "Stoicism in America," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, ed. John Sellars (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 331-45.

food, shelter, and clothing (necessities of life that everyone can connect and relate to as they exist across all cultures so come degree) and the cultural and environmental reasons behind them.

Some ideas Murano Santos puts forth for accomplishing this shift in themes include recontextualizing the exhibit's existing dioramas, which she says "offer rich and strong connections to the past and opportunities for inquiry and interpretation," with modern videos, images, and stories of the people, cultures, or events they represent, or otherwise connecting the dioramas to the new themes and subthemes of the exhibit. She also mentions incorporating the work of local schoolchildren into the exhibit, perhaps in the form of modern profiles of local Seneca people that could be added to the local chronology, which she would also like to see retained, although with a clearer narrative thread and more organization than offered in the existing exhibit.

## Visitor Studies

Visitor studies, including visitor observations, play a crucial role when considering changes to an exhibit.<sup>117</sup> Observing visitors in the exhibit space can not only help museum professionals better understand who the constituencies their institutions serve are and their responses to materials and information presented to them, but also the needs of these constituencies within a space and how these needs impact the visitors' behaviors, learning, and overall experience.

During the three main observation sessions, visitors to *Native Peoples of the Americas* fell fairly consistently into one of three categories: parents (aged approximately 25-35) with young children (typically between the ages of 3 and 9), young people (late teens through early 20s) visiting in pairs or small groups, and older visitors (mid 40s through mid-60s) exploring the exhibit individually.<sup>118</sup> Each of these categories displayed different behaviors within and levels of interaction with the exhibit space.

For example, parents with young children frequently attempted to engage their children by drawing their attention to certain objects or images (“Lookit, Caeden. [Insert object here]!”) and then attempting to relate these items to their child through a framework which they are both aware of and understand, such as a father comparing an Haudenosaunee cradleboard to a Babybjörn<sup>119</sup> in response to his daughter’s concerns over the comfort of an infant mannequin in the full-scale longhouse diorama. Inversely, children called their parents’ attention to things that

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<sup>117</sup> Visitor Studies is the study of how people experience/interact with the exhibit space (and how the information gathered by this study can be used to inform interpretive decisions and improve visitor experiences. It should not be confused with audience research, which is the collecting of demographic information and statistics about visitors (which can be a valuable component of a larger visitor study).

<sup>118</sup> From informal observations made during previous visits to the museum over the past two years, this seems, with some variation, to be largely consistent with the museum’s major visitor constituencies.

<sup>119</sup> A popular manufacturer of products for infants, including a baby carrier that acts in a similar fashion to a cradleboard.



interested them in the space, either through statements such as, “Look at the cow-horse!” or “I found a naked little boy!” or questions, which the parents then attempted to answer. However, limited text in certain areas frequently prevented parents from providing their children with accurate or detailed answers, typically resulting in one of three responses: “I don’t know,” a made-up answer, or the parent pointing out another item or idea that they did know something about.

Young people visiting in pairs or small groups tended to interact similarly with the exhibit. They frequently called attention to things that interest them (for example, on multiple occasions, young women gravitated towards pairs of boots on display and expressed a desire to own a pair of boots like them), but tended to express surprise more than the children do, because rather than building a new concept of who Native Americans were and are from scratch, the young adults were attempting to reconcile what they learned in the space with what they already knew. An excellent example of this was the young man who exclaimed to his girlfriend, “Dang, this is tight! They had a whole village. They had houses. Like houses houses, like what we know as houses,” upon viewing the Pueblo Peoples diorama. In a similar vein, they used the dioramas and displays to recall and frame prior knowledge, as another young man did when explaining to his friends that, as a child, he had done a school project about longhouses. This indicated a different level of inquiry and interaction with the exhibit components. Young people tended to ask each other less serious questions than children and their parents did, as was the case with the boyfriend who asked his girlfriend, “Babe, do you think seal tastes good?” to which she replied, “It *is* protein.” This couple was still interacting with the exhibit, but not as educationally as others did.

In contrast to both of the previous categories of visitor, single, older visitors behaved very differently within the space, largely because they did not verbally interact with the exhibit or the other visitors around them. Compared to the parents/children and the young adults, these visitors moved more slowly from case to case, reading the various case texts before moving on, lingering at cases they were interested in and quickly moving on from those they were not. They tended to try to avoid the young people, parents, and children, moving out of spaces when these individuals entered, indicating a desire for a quiet, solitary experience within the exhibit space.

With regards to physical interactions with the exhibit space itself, various design elements presented different advantages or disadvantages to different visitors. For example, the short, carpeted steps in front of most of the dioramas allowed shorter children to look into the diorama cases without having to be picked up by their parents, thus enabling the children to explore parts of the exhibit by themselves. However, these steps prevented other visitors who use mobility devices like scooters, walkers, and wheelchairs from being able to get near enough to the cases to see some of the smaller details of the dioramas. The large, padded seats in the exhibit present a similar issue, as they provided those visitors experiencing museum fatigue a place to rest, but also impaired the movement of some visitors throughout the space. And the low level of lighting in parts of the exhibit was met with a variety of responses, especially from younger visitors, some of whom appeared to be frightened of the dark (especially the full-scale longhouse diorama, which is minimally internally lit), while others questioned why it is so dark and why they could not see anything in the space. Older visitors occasionally seemed confused by the low lighting (the other exhibits on either end are, by contrast, much more brightly lit), and passed through quickly, perhaps due to a belief that the exhibit was closed, or on their way to the restrooms, which are located on the far side of the exhibit. However, once they noticed others in

the exhibit, they tended to either stop and look at the exhibit or pass more slowly through the space on their return.

And across all three visitor categories, there appeared to be at least one common trend: speaking about the various Native peoples on display in the exhibit in the past tense. From observation alone, it was unclear as to whether this behavior was due to the belief that these peoples/cultures no longer exist, an acknowledgement that they do not necessarily follow any traditional practices anymore, or simply the fact that these people are on display in a museum, so they must be a part of the past.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> While this last viewpoint is not inherently wrong, as anything placed into a museum is, by its very nature, a part of the past, it does tend to exclude the possibility that what is being observed still actively exists in the wider world, outside the constraints of the museum space. Regardless of the cause of this prevalent use of passive voice, it underlines the importance to providing modern contextualization for the exhibit content, especially the dioramas, which are some of the only representations of actual people (in the sense that they depict persons, rather than just an object).

## Recommendations for Redesign

What follows is a list of recommendations for changes that could be made to *Native Peoples of the Americas* to not only ensure better representation of the native cultures it displays, but to increase visitor awareness of, comfort in, and interaction with, the exhibit.

## Organization

- Move away from the two-section (chronology and geographic survey) organizational scheme and toward a thematically linked “micro-exhibit” model, akin to *Face to Face: Encounters with Identity* and the Exhibit Gallery at Ganondagan.
  - This solves the visitor flow issue created by the multiple entrances/exits of the exhibit and allows visitors to move freely throughout the exhibit space
  - Examples of possible “micro-exhibit” sections can be seen in Figure 40, and include:
    - *Haudenosaunee Today* (an expansion on the already existing panels)
      - Profiles of modern members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy
        - Allows the museum to facilitate collaboration between local Haudenosaunee and area school children
    - *Walk a Mile: How Culture and Environment Impact Design*
      - An examination of the effects of culture and environment on the design and construction of an everyday object: the shoe
        - Opens opportunities for cross cultural juxtaposition and questions about what factors impact not only design differences but cultural differences as well
    - *Kids Just Like Me*
      - A portion of the exhibit geared towards children (ages 4 to 10), featuring profiles of contemporary Native children
        - Introduces children to the concepts of cultural similarities and differences
    - *From There to Here: Human Migration and Movement in the Americas*
      - A collection of displays about early human migration to the Americas, later migration from Europe, the forced migration of Native Americans at various points in history, and European-American migration westward
        - Opens dialogues about how/why people move from one place to another
        - Provides opportunities to view multiple cultures at once, rather than isolated from each other

## Exhibition Design

### *Exhibit Space*

- Increase lighting levels (via overhead and spot lighting) in the exhibit space to be comparable to lighting in the exhibits surrounding it<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Of course, these lighting levels would need to meet current accepted guidelines for lighting in exhibits displaying historical objects, however, any increase to exhibit lighting levels might still necessitate the removal of some light-sensitive objects from display (to be replaced with either digital surrogates or replicas), or the design of light protective displays such as the pull-out drawers and cloth coverings utilized at Ganondagan.

- Increases visibility of exhibit components located outside of interior lit display cases
- Improves visitor comfort
- Select and use a standard design aesthetic (color scheme, font, label format, etc.) that not only appropriately reflects the subject matter of the exhibit, but also:
  - Conveys a sense of cohesiveness in an otherwise disparate environment
  - Makes the space fit better with the rest of the museum
- Remove steps in front of dioramas, which can limit the ability of people with mobility impairments to move freely through the exhibit and view the dioramas
  - Possibly replace with moveable steps to help shorter visitors see into the dioramas

#### *Exhibit Text*

- Create legible, appropriately placed signage indicating the names of the entire exhibit and each of the “micro-exhibits”
  - Additional signs for the bathroom eliminated or made subtler
- Use correct and/or preferred terms for groups/tribes/nations
  - This can be accomplished by indicating the name that the group refers to themselves by and the name people would be more familiar with
    - Ex: “The Diné (Navajo)...”
    - Ex: “The Diné, better known as the Navajo...”
    - Ex: “The Navajo, who refer to themselves as the “Diné,” or “the people” in Diné bizaad, a Na-Dené Southern Athabaskan language...”
- Refer to groups using correct tenses
  - Past tense for groups that no longer exist or have become parts of other groups
  - Present tense for groups (or their descendants) who are still living
- Incorporate and correctly credit Native voices within the exhibit space

#### *Integration of Technology and Interactives*

- More interactives
  - The RMSC is full of interactives that allow their visitors to explore and learn while having fun. A similar level of interactivity should be brought to *Native Peoples* via:
    - Digital Interactives
      - Touchscreen maps
        - Allow visitors to zoom in/out, apply different overlays, and view “real time” movements of people and borders
    - Physical Interactives
      - Activities like the wooden wampum beads at Ganondagan (Figure 31)
      - Craft projects facilitated by staff, volunteers, or Native artisans
        - Could include weaving, pottery making (offered in a separate space to the exhibit), beading, and other handicrafts that can be taught at different levels
        - Gives visitors something to do with their hands and something to take home, which will remind them of the experience and, hopefully, something they learned during it

- Greater integration of technology
  - Video
    - Should be kept brief (less than 5 minutes), but informative and engaging
    - Ideally narrated by Native individuals, as another opportunity to incorporate Native voice
    - Volume (if applicable) should be loud enough for visitors to hear, but quiet enough to not disrupt visitors in other sections or conflict with other audio/video
  - Audio
    - Provide narration for Haudenosaunee Myths and Legends section
    - Opportunities for Native voices to be heard
    - Volume should be loud enough for visitors to hear, but quiet enough to not disrupt visitors in other sections or conflict with other audio/video
  - Touchscreens
    - Make maps interactive and allows more to be put into one map/display
    - Give visitors control over how/what they learn
    - If one touchscreen can replace several labels, it frees up more space for objects in cases
      - Also allows the visitor to choose how much information they want to read and potentially to delve deeper into a topic than a normal label would allow
    - Improve accessibility
      - Text sizes can be adjusted to help those with vision impairments read text
        - There is also the potential for the integration of software that can read text aloud for those visitors who cannot see/do not know how to read

### **Collaborative Practices**

- Strengthen existing connections with Native communities and develop new ones
- Implement a formal consultation and review process akin to the NMAI’s “5 Phase Process” with Native “Community Curators” for this and other Native exhibits and programs
  - Ensures respectful practices and accurate representation
  - Provides checks and balances to both Native and curatorial voices
  - Enriches exhibit content with new ideas and themes that are relevant to modern source communities

### **Thematic Shifts**

- Take advantage of the “micro-exhibit” model to explore the following themes:
  - Cross-cultural juxtaposition to highlight cultural similarities and differences, as well as cross-cultural influences
    - European-Native and Native-Native
    - No more geographical and/or chronological isolation
  - Cultural ownership, DNA testing, and NAGPRA
  - Human innovation

- Contemporary Native cultures and the impact of modern life on tradition

### **Programming and Outreach**

- Increase awareness about the existence of the exhibit via:
  - Improved and expanded school programming and educational materials developed collaboratively with Native partners, like the NMAI's Native Knowledge 360° program. Possible programming and materials include:
    - Before/after visit lesson plans for teachers to use in their classrooms to introduce/tie into lessons learned at the museum
    - More collaborative projects between area school children and living Seneca and Haudenosaunee, like the current "Haudenosaunee Today" panels
    - Activity-based exhibit programs for school/scout groups, offered daily<sup>122</sup>
- Increased on-site events such as:
  - Craft demonstrations
  - Lectures
  - Performances
  - Cultural festivals

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<sup>122</sup> The RMSC's two Native themed program "Add Ons" are currently only offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays, per their website.

## Further Implications

It is impossible to conclude this thesis without acknowledging that the Rochester Museum and Science Center is not the only museum that needs to work to re-evaluate and redesign its exhibits that represent Native Americans. For example, three hours south of Rochester, in Binghamton, NY, is another RMSC-- the Roberson Museum and Science Center. A relatively small, but well-respected institution in another region of New York state, this RMSC offers its visitors the unique opportunity to view fine art, science, and local history exhibits, experience a planetarium, and tour a historic house all in one place. And, tucked away in a back corner, behind the Binghamton Visitor Center and en route to an auditorium and event space, is a small exhibit on the region's native Haudenosaunee.

While the Roberson does actively offer a school program on "Iroquois Culture" and a series of panels about local Native history (told from the perspective of European colonists and soldiers) line a back staircase to the second floor, little attention is paid to this exhibit and it shows. The interiors of cases are dusty and some contain cobwebs, mannequins are showing their age, and objects that have been removed due to NAGPRA requirements have neither been acknowledged, nor replaced with other items or text, the latter of which the exhibit desperately needs more of. It also lacks any sort of tangible thematic or narrative connection between the historical people on display and the region's modern Haudenosaunee, making it seem as if they simply died out due to starvation, clashes with European colonists, or some other, unknown factor, rather than living on as a vibrant culture.<sup>123</sup>

While the Roberson lacks the budget and staff to fully redesign the exhibit at this time, some of the smaller changes and additions recommended in the preceding section of this thesis

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<sup>123</sup> This description reflects the state of the exhibit when the author was an intern at the museum during the summer of 2016.



are easily and economically achievable. For example, colorful, updated text panels could not only brighten up a drab, unappealing space, but also provide more recent scholarship, modern contextualization for the objects, themes and concepts on display, and allow for the presence of Native voices within the space. Rearranging objects or bringing other objects out of storage could update the exhibit for free and allow the museum to keep visitors who have previously seen the exhibit interested in it. And, perhaps most importantly, more prominent signage for the exhibit could attract more visitors, who could be further engaged with increased public programming beyond the currently offered school program, such as working with local and regional Haudenosaunee heritage organizations to host cultural festivals, lectures, performances, and crafting demonstrations in the museum's various event spaces.

The Roberson, like the Rochester Museum and Science Center, is one of many institutions all over the United States that could benefit from reviewing their Native American exhibits, conducting visitor studies, bringing in Native consultants, and implementing some of this thesis' recommendations. But these efforts should not be made with a relatively insular institutional mindset, rather as part of a larger conversation between museums, anthropological, historical, and museological scholars, Native groups and organizations, and other stakeholders, to better understand and clarify the role of museums in the ongoing interpretation and representation of Native cultures both within and without the museum environment. This conversation may ultimately take many forms, from the collaborative creation of evaluative criteria for current Native American exhibits, to the development of basic universal standards for Native representation in museum spaces, but regardless of what forms it takes, this conversation

will result in better overall representation of the vibrant and vital Native cultures on display.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> The development of universal standards for Native representation in museum spaces is not a one-size-fits-all solution for improving Native representations and exhibits. Evaluation of individual priorities and needs within each specific museum and/or community should still take precedence, however, clearly outlined standards for what can and cannot be displayed (secular v. sacred, for example) and how best to do so, can help shape decisions made by those who conduct evaluations and redesigns of Native exhibits. Additionally, multi-stakeholder collaboration is key in the development of such guidelines, as differing perspectives and understandings of what is acceptable culturally and/or institutionally can help to ensure both appropriate and realistic expectations for museum practices. The idea for the development of such guidelines and/or evaluative criteria came from Michael Galban, Interpretive Programs Assistant/Curator at the Seneca Art & Culture Center, Ganondagan State Historic Site, in an email to the author, April 20, 2018.

## Appendices

### 1. Figures

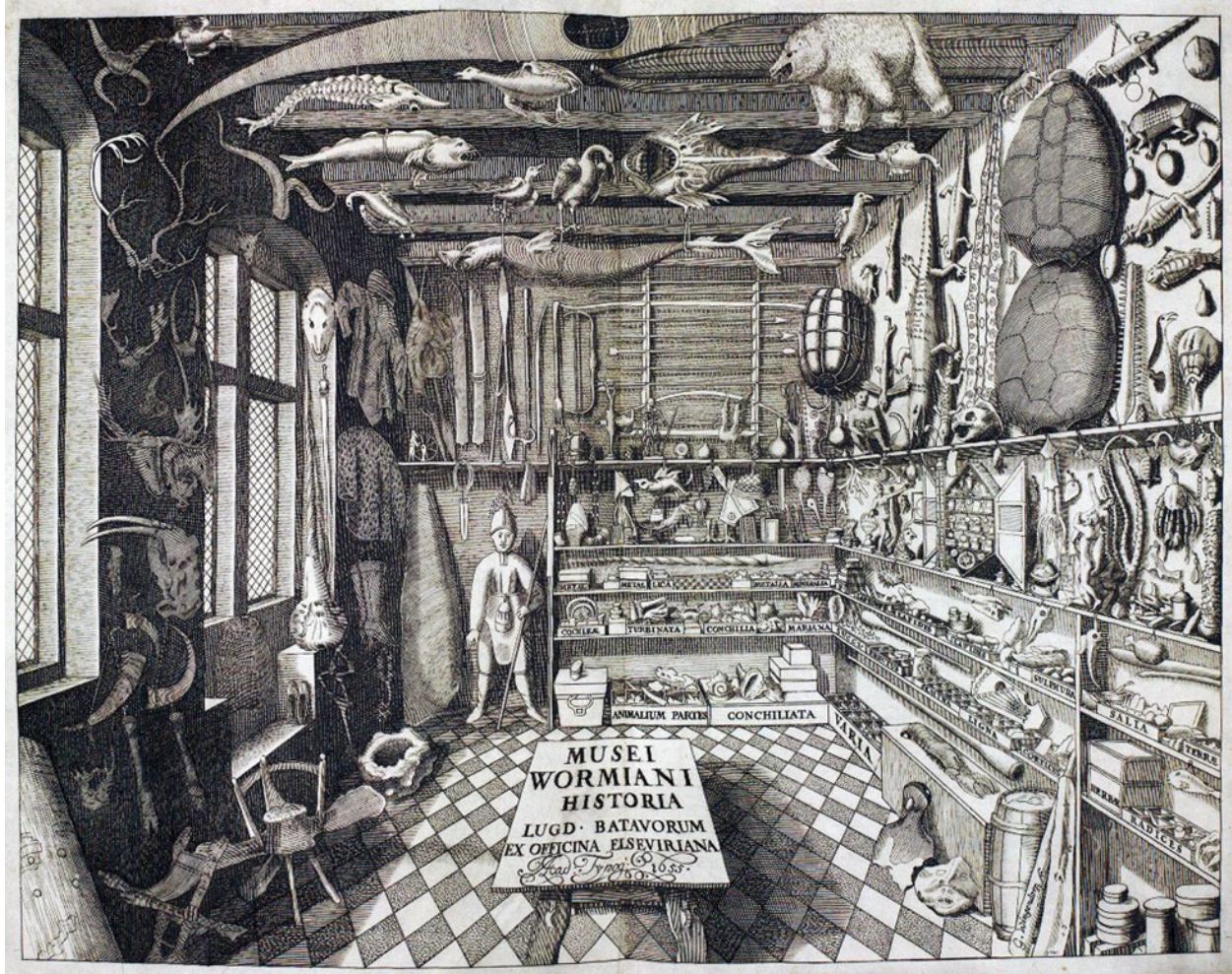


Figure 1. 17<sup>th</sup> century engraving of Danish naturalist Ole Worm's "wonder room," or "wunderkammer," from the frontispiece of his 1655 collection catalog *Museum Wormianum*. (Image from the Wikimedia Commons, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet\\_of\\_curiosities#/media/File:Musei\\_Wormiani\\_Historia.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_of_curiosities#/media/File:Musei_Wormiani_Historia.jpg))



Figure 2. Men with an exhibit case containing Native American clothing and accessories, ready to be installed in the Field Museum in Chicago. (Photograph by Charles Carpenter, "Men with [Indian] North American Artifacts in Cases," The Field Museum, c.1920, <http://www.idaillinois.org/cdm/ref/collection/fmnh2/id/559>).



Figure 3. Native objects from the Southwest, California, and Northwest coast on display in the West Hall of the Museum of the American Indian in New York City. Although taken in the 1960s, little was changed from how Heye had originally elected to organize and display his collection in the 1910s and 20s. (Photograph by Carmelo Guadagno, “View of exhibits in the West Hall, 2nd floor, Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation, 155th and Broadway, New York,” June 1960.

[http://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:NMAI\\_337483?q=record\\_ID%3ANMAI\\_337483&record=1&hlterm=record\\_ID%3ANMAI\\_337483&inline=true](http://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:NMAI_337483?q=record_ID%3ANMAI_337483&record=1&hlterm=record_ID%3ANMAI_337483&inline=true)).

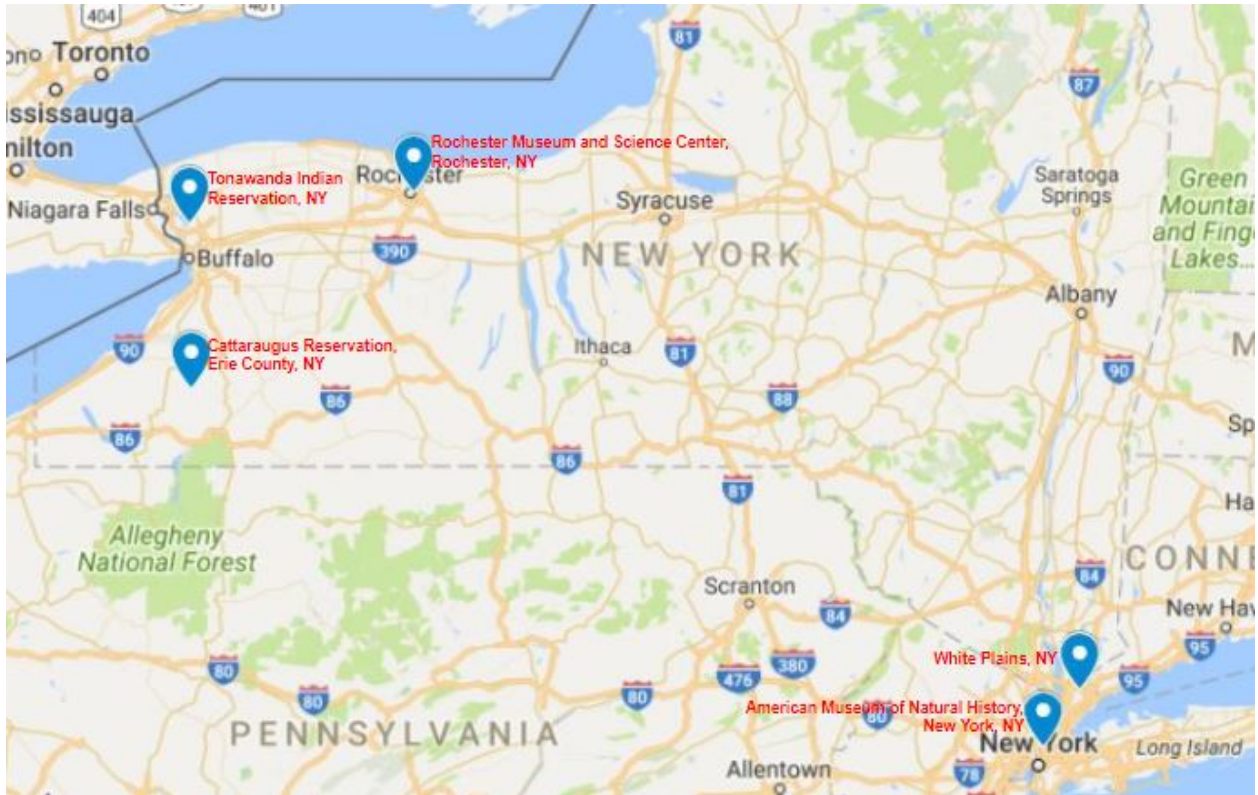


Figure 4. Map with locations pertinent to the life of Arthur C. Parker. (Created by author using Google Maps, April 2018).

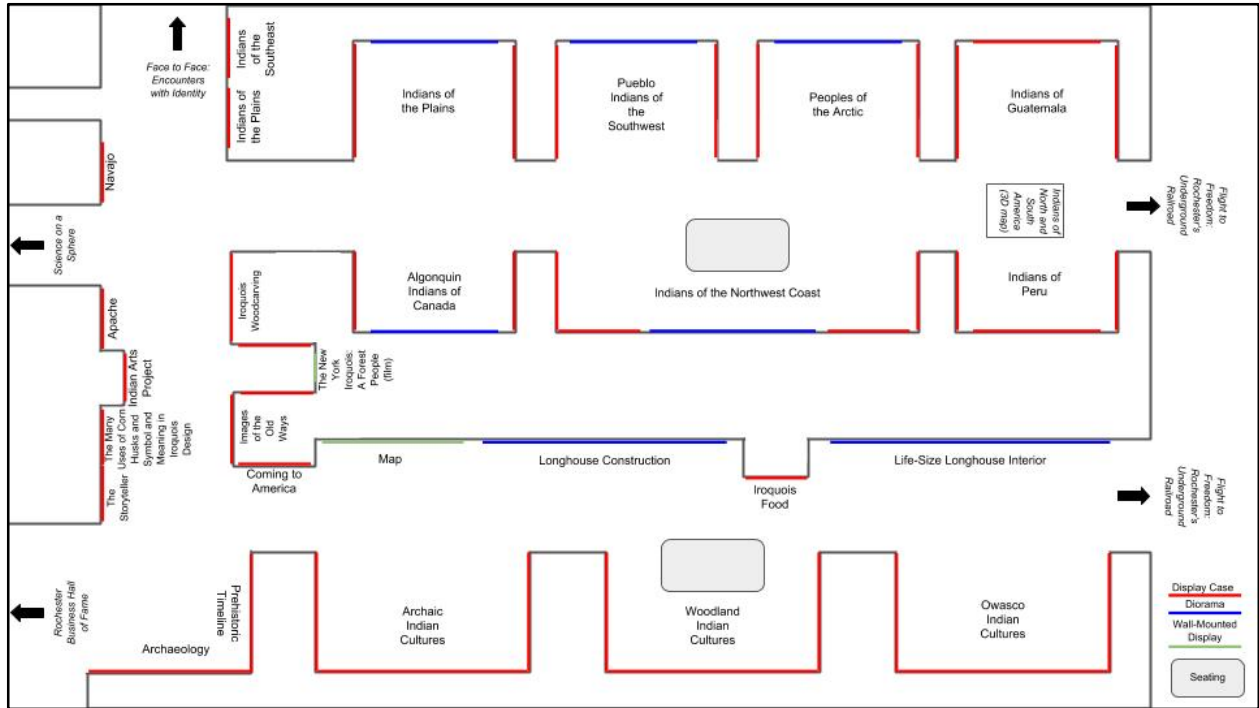


Figure 5. Floorplan of current *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit at the RMSC. (Created by author, January 2018).



Figure 6. Artifacts mounted to suspended sheets of plexiglass in the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit. (Photograph by author, November 2017).





Figure 7. Artifacts lay flat on staggered shelving in the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 8. Mural depicting the preparation of a grave, from the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 9. Lifesize archaeological dig site diorama in the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 10. Diorama of a longhouse under construction. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 11. Lifesize diorama of a longhouse interior. (Photograph by author, November 2017).

# Haudenosaunee Today

## Meet Ronnie Reitter



Ronnie is a Seneca woman and is part of the wolf clan. Before she retired, she used to work at Kodak, the RMSC, and Ganondagan.

She lives in a gray two-story house with an attached garage. Her sons are all grown up so now she lives by herself.

### What Does She Do for Fun?

Ronnie has many things that she likes to do for fun. She likes to go to the movies, hike, and spend time with her grandchildren.

She also likes to make traditional art like the Haudenosaunee of long ago. She makes corn husk dolls with no faces just like her ancestors did and she weaves baskets. She also does beadwork. She made all of these!



### Does She Make Her Own Clothes?

Making your own clothes is hard work! The Haudenosaunee of long ago had to make everything. Today Ronnie wears everyday clothes like jeans and shirts that she buys from the store.



Ronnie chooses to make some clothes for fun. She started sewing clothes when she was eleven. First she made everyday clothes, then she made traditional ribbon clothes, and then clothes for corn husk dolls.

### Does She Grow Her Own Food?

Long ago Haudenosaunee people had to grow all of their own food. Like her ancestors, Ronnie grows plants, too, but only some. She grows native tobacco for ceremonies and she grows native beans in containers.



Ronnie also shops at Wegmans. She enjoys blueberries, strawberries and blackberries, turkey and chili. She likes to eat almost everything except lima beans.

### Remembering Traditions

Ronnie thinks remembering traditions is important. She goes to a longhouse for ceremonies just like the Haudenosaunee of long ago. She doesn't go to a bark longhouse, though. She goes to a modern longhouse. At ceremonies Ronnie eats special foods and listens to speakers and there is dancing!



Created by the 2017-2018 First Grade Class at the Geneva Community Charter School

Figure 12. One of four “Haudenosaunee Today” posters that were recently added to the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit. (Photograph by Jo Andrews, March 2018).

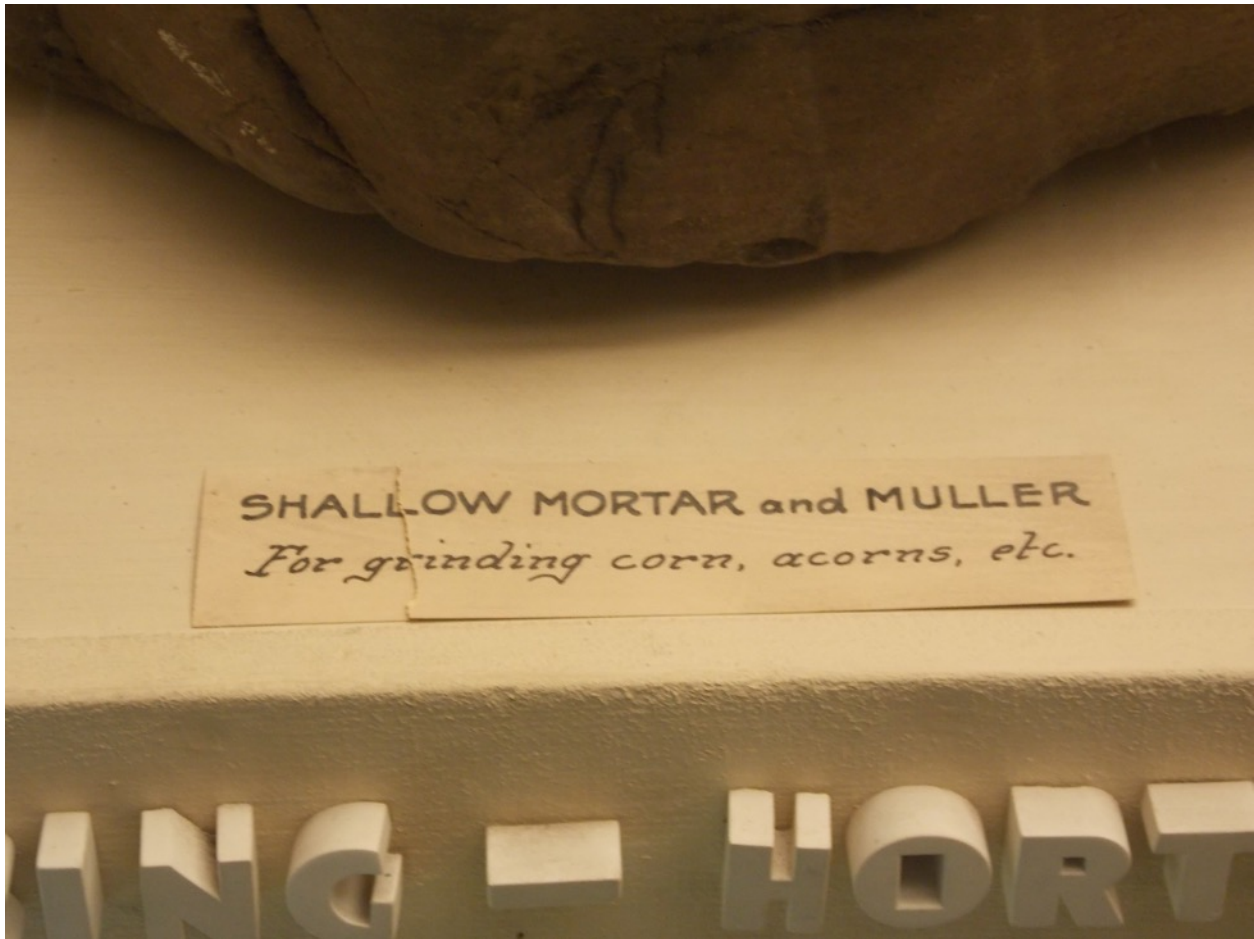


Figure 13. Cracked, handwritten object label in the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit. (Photograph by Jo Andrews, March 2018).



Figure 14. Tabletop topographical map of North and Central America showing the locations of various Native groups featured in the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit. (Photograph by author, November 2017).





Figure 15. "Peoples of the Arctic" diorama with carpeted step. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 16. Space in one of the “Pueblo Peoples” cases where an object was removed. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 17. Poster addressing items removed from the *Native Peoples of the Americas* exhibit due to NAGPRA. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 18. An arrangement of masks from different countries and cultures in *Face to Face: Encounters with Identity*. (Photograph by Jo Andrews, March 2018).



Figure 19. Entrance panel for *Face to Face: Encounters with Identity*, featuring brief introductions to each of the six “micro-exhibits” that comprise the larger whole.



Figure 20. Visitors are encouraged to test out this mortar and pestle in the *At the Western Door* exhibit. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 21. Panels, like the one pictured above, ask visitors reflection questions in the *At the Western Door* exhibit. (Photograph by author, November 2017).



Figure 22. The open, bright Exhibit Gallery at the Seneca Art & Culture Center. (Photograph provided to North Country Public Radio by the Ganondagan State Historic Site, 2015. <https://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/story/29850/20151020/center-for-iroquois-arts-and-culture-opens-this-weekend>).





Figure 23. Case displaying examples of objects historically used in everyday life at the Ganondagan site. (Photograph by author, December 2017).



Figure 24. Photographs of contemporary Seneca hanging in the Exhibit Gallery at the Ganondagan State Historic Site's Seneca Art and Culture Center. (Photograph by author, December 2017).

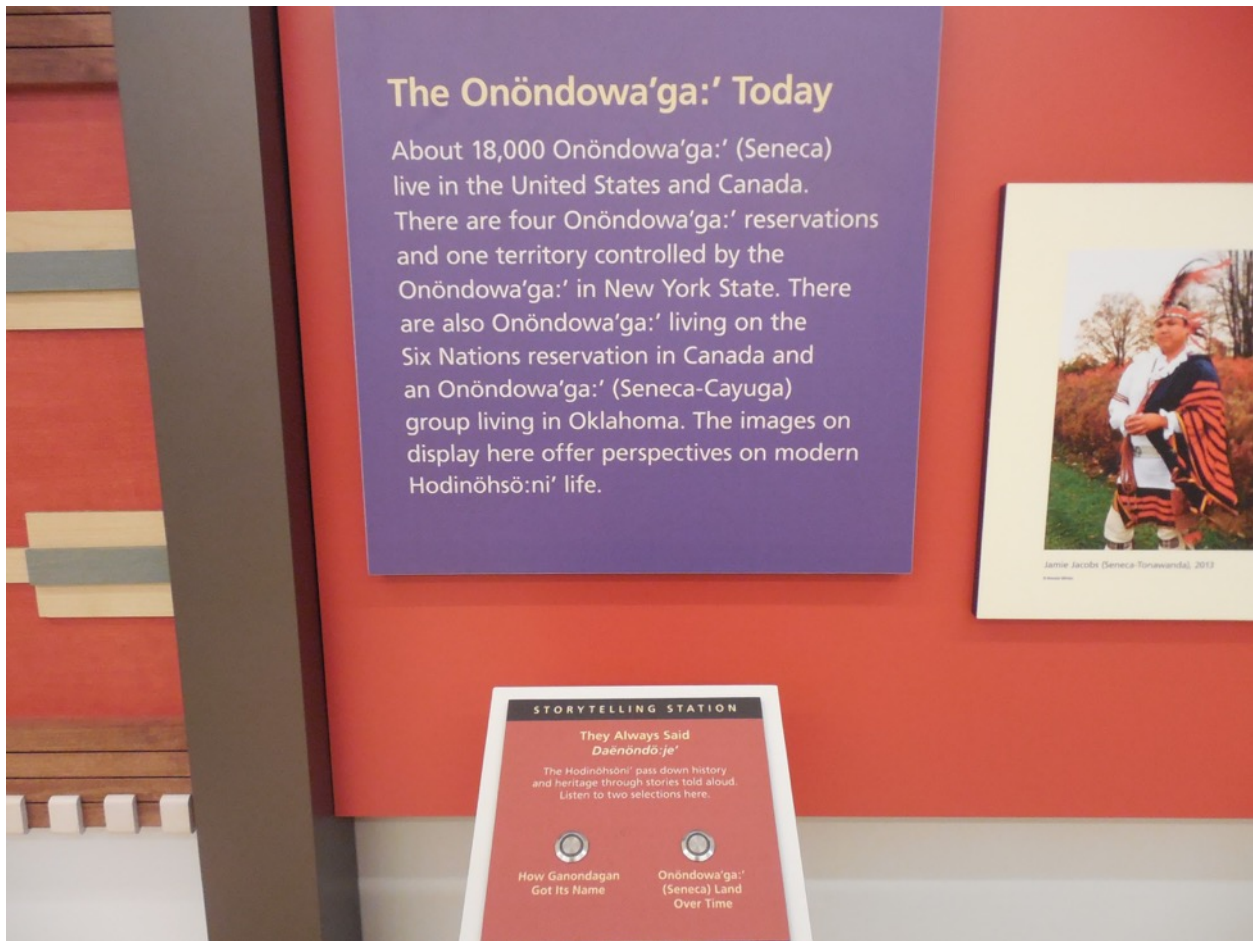
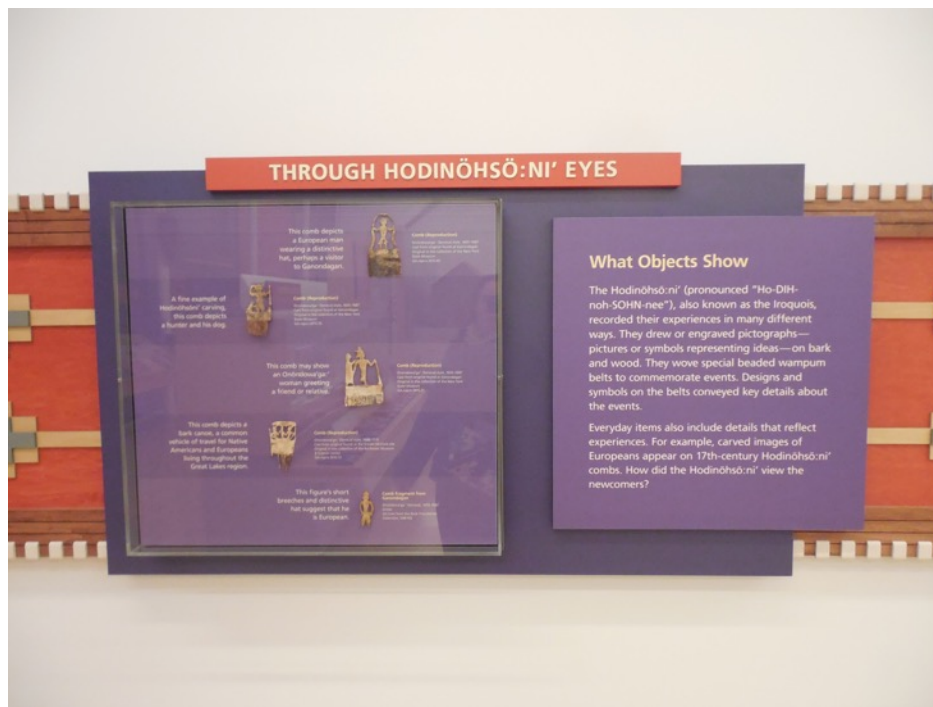


Figure 25. Red and purple feature prominently throughout the exhibit space and tie disparate exhibit elements together in the Exhibit Gallery at the Ganondagan State Historic Site's Seneca Art and Culture Center. (Photograph by author, December 2017).



Figures 26 and 27. Panels in the Exhibit Gallery at the Ganondagan State Historic Site’s Seneca Art and Culture Center explain ways (methods) of “knowing” about the history of Ganondagan from both the Haudenosaunee and European perspective. (Photograph by author, December 2017).



Figure 28. Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team exhibit in the Exhibit Gallery at the Ganondagan State Historic Site's Seneca Art and Culture Center. This case rotates through exhibits and currently houses *Hodinöhsö:ni' Women: From the Time of Creation*. (Photograph by author, December 2017).



Figure 29. Pull-out drawers allow the display of documents that would normally be too light sensitive to display on an exhibit floor and economize on display space in the Exhibit Gallery at the Ganondagan State Historic Site's Seneca Art and Culture Center. (Photograph by author, December 2017).



Figure 30. Interactive touchscreen map showing the Seneca's "Aboriginal Territories" and the expansion of European colonization in the Exhibit Gallery at the Ganondagan State Historic Site's Seneca Art and Culture Center. (Photograph by author, December 2017).

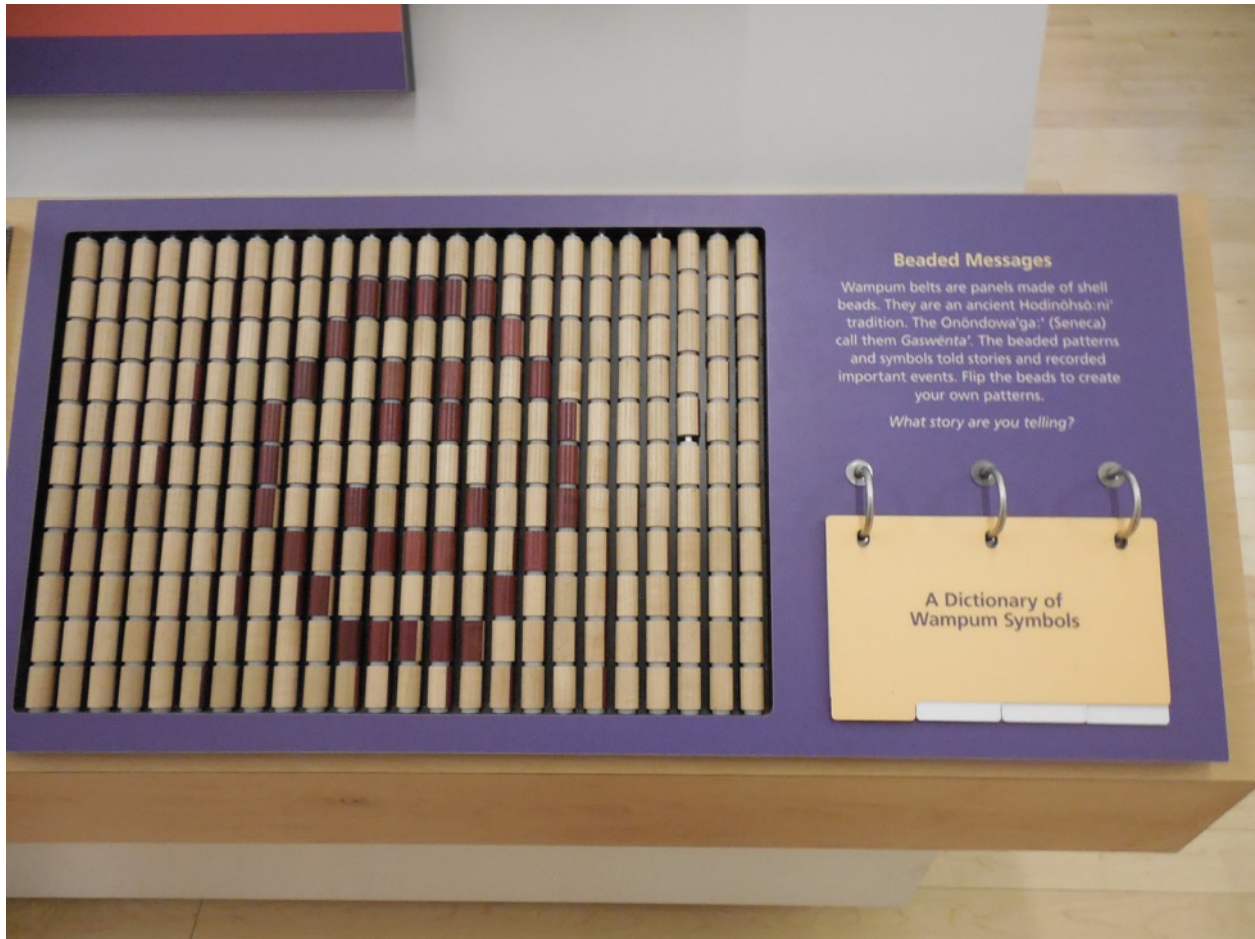


Figure 31. This oversized wooden bead interactive allows visitors to create their own wampum belt patterns in the Exhibit Gallery at the Ganondagan State Historic Site's Seneca Art and Culture Center. (Photograph by author, December 2017).





Figure 32. Buttons turn on otherwise invisible LED outlines on a small-scale diorama of the historic Ganondagan site. (Photograph by author, December 2017).



Figure 33. Exterior of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. (Photograph from the National Museum of the American Indian, <http://nmai.si.edu/visit/washington/>).



Figure 34. Exterior of the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City. (Photograph from the National Museum of the American Indian, <http://nmai.si.edu/visit/newyork/>).



Figure 35. Objects in cases are accompanied by both wall text and video and interactive screens at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. (Photograph by Steve Tokar, April 2014, <https://stevetokar.wordpress.com/2014/04/07/national-museum-of-the-american-indian/>).



Figure 36. A young visitor interacts with a touch screen in the *Windows On* exhibit at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. (Photograph by Mara Gorman, 2011, <https://www.motherofalltrips.com/2011/05/visiting-the-national-museum-of-the-american-indian-with-kids.html>).



Figure 37. Visitors test out the “The Cusco Experience” touchscreen table in *The Great Inka Road: Engineering an Empire* exhibit the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. (Photograph by Ideum, June 2015, <https://www.ideum.com/portfolio/great-inka-road>).



Figure 38. Installation detail of *Manifestipi*, by the ITWÉ Collective, a trans-disciplinary art collective dedicated to research, creation, production and education in the field of Aboriginal digital culture from Winnipeg and Montréal, Canada, at the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City. (Photograph by Joshua Voda, “*Manifestipi*, (installation detail) 2016 by ITWÉ Collective,” 2018. <http://nmai.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/item/?id=965>).



Figure 39. Martha Redbone, a blues and soul singer of Cherokee, Choctaw, European and African-American descent, performs at the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City in June 2017. (Photograph from Smithsonian Music, <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/native-american-music/videos-of-nmai-performances>).



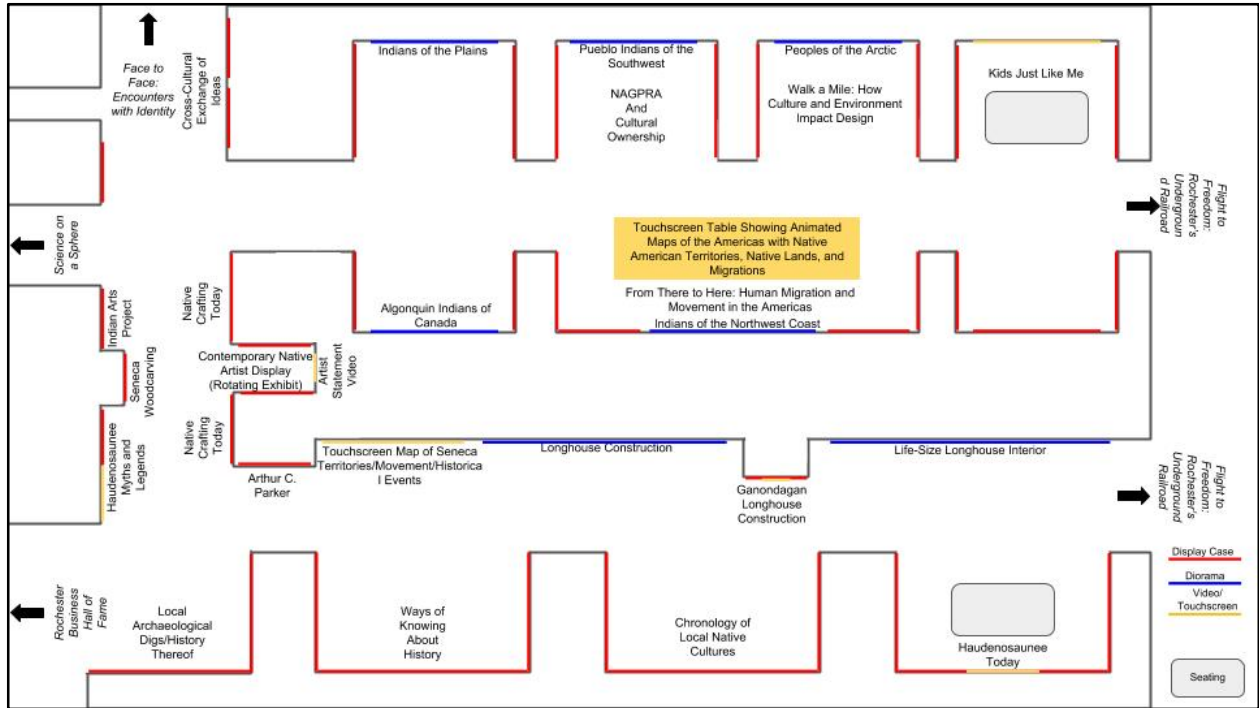


Figure 40. Floorplan of *Native Peoples of the Americas* featuring proposed changes to the exhibit layout. (Created by author, April 2018).

## 2. Case Study Notes

Notes on *Native Peoples of the Americas*, as observed on November 22, 2017, January 12, 2018, and February 11, 2018

### Exhibit Space

- Very dark/low lighting
  - Lit only by lights in cases
  - The *Rochester's Business Hall of Fame* and *Flight to Freedom: Rochester's Underground Railroad* exhibits are on either side of *Native Peoples* and are brightly lit
    - *Native Peoples* used as a pass-through from one lit area to the other
  - Not very welcoming/exhibit might look closed to some visitors
  - Full-scale longhouse scene is too dark
    - A mother passing by on the way to the bathroom with her children pointed at it and said, "Ooh, that's scary!" and her children hurried past it as fast as they could
  - Exhibit content not in cases hard to read/look at
- Carpeted step-ups in front of dioramas
  - Provides good access for younger visitors
  - However, could impede viewing by wheelchair-bound patrons or those who use walkers
    - May also be a tripping hazard
- Overall signage needed
  - No sign to indicate the name of the exhibit
    - However, in the same area there are full-scale signs for the *Flight to Freedom: Rochester's Underground Railroad* and *Face to Face* exhibits
  - Lots of directional signage for bathrooms, and the exhibit's main purpose to most visitors seems to be as a pass-through to the 2nd floor restrooms

### Labels/Text

- Inconsistency between tenses in different parts of the exhibits
  - Use of present tense in some cases makes it appear that some tribes/groups still live as they did 100+ years ago
  - Past tense makes others sound as if they no longer exist, even though they do
- Term "Indian" used in place of proper names for indigenous groups
  - What did/do those groups refer to themselves as?
  - If talking about multiple groups, what is the correct term?
    - "Native Peoples of [Region]"?
    - Where appropriate, "Confederacy"?
- Not a lot of contextualization
  - Need for object interpretive labels
- Faded, handwritten object labels in some cases
  - No standard font/format for labels across entire exhibit

### Thematic Elements

- Exhibit broken up by region, with no accounting for overlap of tribal/nation territories
  - Makes it seem as if all peoples in the same region were members of the same tribe/nation
  - Replace broken, scratched up maps of regions with new, potentially interactive map
- Native American voice is lacking, pretty much non-existent
  - Remove very outdated video about how the Native peoples of the Rochester region “lived” (passive voice, makes it sound as if there are no members of these communities left, while simultaneously, portraying them as still living as they did over 100 years ago)
    - Replace with video of contemporary Native Americans speaking about aspects of traditional customs/practices that are still employed in their everyday lives

#### **A Few Notes on *At the Western Door* for Comparison...**

- Active voice in labels
- Clear intro panel
  - Admittedly, only one entrance/exit, as opposed to two
- Visitor engagement questions in text
- A more recent video (when was the video made?)
- Touch screen to scroll through labels for two cases
- “Hands on” interactive
  - Mortar and pestle
- Audio
  - From Native perspective
- Openly addresses European impact on Native cultures
  - Contrasts cultures

#### **A Few Notes on *Face to Face* for Comparison...**

- Juxtaposition of objects from different cultures to highlight both the universality of larger concepts and the different facets and values of the individual cultures
- “Micro” exhibits that all explore one overarching theme
  - Expressions of human identity

## **Notes on the Exhibit Gallery in the Seneca Art & Culture Center, Ganondagan State Historic Site, as observed on December 20, 2017**

### **Exhibit Space**

- Dynamic design
  - Use of color and pattern to connect separate sections/elements and make the exhibit space feel cohesive
- Facsimiles/surrogates of objects that are too fragile or absent from collection
  - Also allows for visitors to touch/interact with some objects
- Multiple examples of 1 type of object to show variety/variations or evolutions of design
- Interactivity in the form of tactile items (such as an oversized bead model), a light up diorama of the site, and a light up longhouse model
- 1 section rotates approximately every 2 years
- Audio guides
  - Use adequate volume
  - Provide Native voice
  - Also, a section with audio, pronunciation guide, and word meaning
- 1 video on loop
  - Can be heard throughout entire exhibit space
  - Other videos on smaller touch screens
    - Provide modern context for customs/rituals/traditions
- Modern and 20th century images
- Interactive/touchscreen map showing changing Seneca territory over time
- Pull-out drawers for documents

### **Labels/Text**

- Thorough labels w/ explanations of object uses and ideological concepts
- Still quite a bit of passive voice

### **Thematic Elements**

- Examination of different means of “knowing” history
  - Written European accounts v. Native oral history v. modern archaeological research and discoveries
- Asks questions of visitors
- Native artifacts shown alongside European contemporaries
  - Establishes visual contrast

### **3. Notes from Interview with Kathryn Murano Santos, Senior Director for Collections and Exhibits, RMSC, January 12, 2018**

#### **What are your thoughts on the exhibit as it currently exists?**

- The chronology of local Native groups often isn't viewed as chronological
  - Ends abruptly with the Owasco culture, and offers no connections to modern Seneca
- Items from burials are labeled as such
  - Beyond the ethical issues this presents regarding the display of these items, they also shouldn't be indicated specifically as coming from a burial context versus items not from a burial context
- Murals in the backs of cases are problematic, because they don't show the full range of human expression
  - Makes it look like the Native Americans were never happy
  - Perpetuates the stereotype of the "stoic Indian"
  - Don't really add to the educational value or aesthetics of the exhibit
- Lack of Native input
- Dioramas offer rich and strong connections to the past, opportunities for inquiry and interpretation

#### **What do you envision the overarching theme(s) of the exhibit to be and how does it fit with the rest of the Museum and its mission?**

- Human rights
  - Why are these exhibits still relevant?
- DNA testing
  - Cultural ownership
- Ways of knowing
  - Oral histories, written accounts, formal documents, archaeological and scientific evidence
- Cross-cultural flow of ideas
  - Between native cultures, between Europeans and native cultures
- Food/Shelter/Clothes
  - Necessities of life that everyone can connect/relate to, exist across all cultures to some degree
- All relate to human innovation in some way

#### **What portions of the exhibit as it currently exists would you specifically like to retain?**

- Dioramas
  - Recontextualize or incorporate into theme being explored in its specific section
- Local chronology

#### **What portions of the exhibit as it currently exists would you specifically like to remove?**

- Gruesome fixation with death/burial present in portions of the exhibit

#### **What would you like to add to the exhibit?**

- Incorporate work from local schoolchildren

- Have them work on modern profiles of local Seneca to add a modern chapter to the local chronology
- Add spotlighting when and where necessary, to enable better viewing of exhibit components located outside of display cases

#### 4. Visitor Observation Notes

**November 22, 2017**

*2:00 to 3:00pm*

- 14 visitors
  - 7 adults, aged approximately 18 to 35
  - 7 children, aged approximately 4 to 10
- Behaviors and Interactions
  - Most on their way to the restroom or goofing off (running through exhibit, in and out of exhibition “bays”)
  - Older adults linger, especially if they are alone, but not for long, as there is little to read/interact with
    - Even less for younger children, who seem to prefer areas of the museum with more hands-on activities or interactive elements
  - Mother to her 5 children, “[I want you to each learn] one cool Indian fact [to share with Grandpa tomorrow [Thanksgiving]].”
  - Boyfriend to girlfriend, looking at igloo diorama, “Babe, do you think seal tastes good?” Girlfriend’s reply, “It *is* protein.”
    - Same girlfriend to boyfriend, pointing to a pair of hide boots in one of the cases. “Oh, look at the cute boots.”
  - Girl to her friend, pointing to a different pair of hide boots in another case, “I *want* those.”
  - A mother passing by on the way to the bathroom with her children pointed at longhouse diorama, which has no lights in it, and said, “Ooh, that’s scary!” and her children hurried past it as fast as they could because they were afraid.

**January 12, 2018**

*10:15 to 11:30am*

- 20 visitors
  - 13 adults, aged approximately 25 to 35
  - 7 children, aged 4 or under
- Behaviors and Interactions
  - Mother reading myths to her daughter
  - Different mother instructing her son about the longhouse diorama
    - “This is a longhouse. They lived in those.”
  - Father and son looking at longhouse interior
  - Another mother answering her daughter’s questions
    - Gave made-up (somewhat inaccurate)
  - Little girl stopped at Plains Indian diorama, pointing out the “cow-horse” (paint pony) and “tent” (teepee) to her mother
  - Handicapped group
    - Man in a wheelchair had difficulty approaching the igloo diorama because of the step in front of it
      - However, earlier, small children need the step to reach the diorama

## February 11, 2018

2:00 to 3:10pm

- 34 visitors
  - 19 adults, mix of age ranges and genders
    - 6 approximately in their 20s
    - 7 approximately in their 30s
    - 5 approximately in their 40s-50s
    - 1 approximately in his 60s
  - 15 children, aged between 4 and 12
    - Some were younger, with one being an infant in a stroller
- Behaviors and Interactions
  - Older man moving quickly through the chronological regional history section, not really reading anything (but, then, there isn't much to read except the basic object labels for each item)
    - Didn't go to geographical section (didn't know it was there? Didn't know it was part of the same exhibit?)
  - Father (30s) with three children (maybe 4, 6, and 9)
    - Explains to daughter (6) that the cradleboard in the full-scale longhouse diorama is "like the first Baby Bjorn."
    - Daughter also asked why the longhouse was so dark and
    - Son (9) yells, "I found a naked little boy!" when looking at the Algonquin diorama.
  - Woman (30s) on phone in archaeological dig diorama (b/c the exhibit is quieter than much of the rest of the museum)
  - "This is us. This is longhouses," a 20-something man to his two friends (based on the conversation that followed they had built longhouses as a project in school)
  - 20 something boyfriend to 20 something girlfriend while looking at pueblo peoples diorama, "Dang, this is tight. They had a whole village. They had houses. Like houses houses, like what we know as houses."
  - Mother and father dragging tired son (maybe 4) through exhibit.
    - "This is what they wore to keep warm."
    - "Lookit, Caeden. [insert object here]." (mother repeated this phrase while the child tried to curl up on a padded bench to nap).
  - Daughter (maybe 8) to mother, "Looks like *Moana*!" in Northwest Coast diorama area.



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